

# A Brief History of Education in Preston County

## Introduction

Preston County was formed in 1818 from Monongalia County and named in honor of James Patton Preston, Revolutionary War hero and governor of Virginia. It forms the northeast corner of the state of West Virginia, being bounded by the famed Mason-Dixon Line, separating it from Pennsylvania on the north. To the east, the border with the state of Maryland begins on the south at the historic Fairfax Stone.

## The Pioneer Period -- 1766 to 1800

The first period was that of the Pioneer, and dated approximately from 1766, the time of the first settlers with families, to 1800. By the close of the Revolutionary War, there were some 300 people residing within the present boundaries of Preston County. These were scattered, but family units were to be found on the Dunkard Bottom, about three miles from Kingwood along the Cheat River; in the Sandy Creek Glades; around Mt. Carmel (Aurora); in the Whetsell Settlement; and the northeast corner of the county. There was but one person of school age for every four square miles of territory; nor was there a general desire for education. The first Constitution of the newly created Commonwealth of Virginia had no word regarding public education.

Until very late in the period, there were no roads over which people could travel and transport goods. Paths and trails were followed, and pack horses carried necessities only. With the exception of the glades, the Preston County area was one big, sprawling forest, difficult of access and foreboding to the settler. So it was that education was not needed to hack the forest, to hunt the game, and to weave the linsey.

By 1790, however, Indian and governmental troubles were resolved; and a somewhat different type of settler began probing Preston's hills. These people were home seekers of a higher type. A few were businessmen, and they brought with them various religious sects. At Mt. Carmel, a Lutheran settlement, the first school of record was started in 1790 by Christian Augustus Whitehair. At the east end of Kingwood, a little settlement had sprung up; and there is evidence of a school there, taught by a man named Fogerson.

The State Road from Winchester, Virginia, to Morgantown and Clarksburg was widened and resurveyed about this time; and a mail stop was established at Kingwood.

This Pioneer Period was indeed a trying time. Not much was done except to build a few crude mills, clear some of the vast timberlands, locate a few roads, and insure land ownership. An act in 1796 by the Virginia General Assembly authorized each county to choose three of its most honest and able men to look after the educational interests of the citizens. Taxes could be levied countywide for support, but nearly all funds came from tuition fees.

## The Transition Period -- 1800 to 1863

The second period, which we may call the Transition, was one of growth and radical changes. It spanned over a half-century, 1800 to 1860. In 1809 an act was passed that created the Literary Fund which was to help schools by paying the fees for indigent children. Preston County made some use of these funds; but since the total amount was limited, not much money was available to each county.

At the time of the formation of Preston county (1818), population was starting to concentrate in the central and northern portions. The old State Road through the central section was the avenue over which thousands passed on their way to Kentucky and Ohio, and many remained in Preston County. The National Road was built a few miles north of the county's border and, with connecting roads, brought a vast influx of people to northern Preston County. There were two towns of consequence: Brandonville and Kingwood, the county seat. With connections to the east, business expanded; and the need for education became more apparent.

By 1831, it was reported that there were 31 schools and 31 teachers in the county; and several hundred dollars had been received from the Literary Fund.

The Brandonville area had a very good school in the 1830's as an old "copy book" attests. Advanced language and mathematics textbooks were ordered by the dozen through a store there.

Envious of the success of the National Road and fearing loss of trade, the commonwealth of Virginia built a turnpike from Winchester to Parkersburg. This road went across the southern portion of Preston County, and another influx of settlers came in. Trade expanded and several towns -- Aurora, Fellowsville, and Evansville -- developed, so that by 1840 there was a building up of this portion of the county. A newspaper was published at Fellowsville, and there were mail routes to the east and west.

By the 1840's a strong degree of community solidarity had been reached in Preston County. There were markets in the east for its agricultural products, and population slowly was increasing. So there was started in Kingwood the **Preston Academy**, incorporated January 2, 1841, which offered primary and advanced education. Many men who later became prominent in county and state circles attended that school, and the first president of the state's university had been a teacher there.

Following closely on the opening of that academy was the **Brandonville Academy** in Brandonville. This school was incorporated March 27, 1843, and served that community well for a number of years.

By 1850 there were 42 common schools and 42 teachers in the county ...and then came the railroad. A major east-west B&O railway was established, coursing through the southern part of Preston County, through the towns of Newburg, Tunnelton (named for a large railway tunnel engineered for this line), Rowlesburg, and up the mountain to Terra Alta, on its way to points east. Much of the economy of Preston County and these towns in particular was tied

in with the railroad and its coal burning steam locomotives. This railroad caused a shift of population from the northern part of the county to the central and southern sections and added many problems to those district schools that existed.

There had been only a few short years of this building when the Civil War stopped everything. Civil government, schools, legal activities -- all were stopped for a few years.

### **West Virginia Becomes a State -- The Public School Period -- 1863 to 1933**

The Public School Period can be dated from June 20, 1863, the date West Virginia entered the Union. The state constitution provided for public schools on a basis of magisterial districts. With a number of modifications, especially in 1872, that remained the general type of system until 1934.

On March 1869, the county courthouse was burned; and all records were destroyed.

During the next 30 years or so, the county had a slow but substantial growth in business and population. By 1898, the educational areas had grown tremendously. There were one high school (Kingwood), six grammar schools, eight two-room schools, and 113 one-room schools. One hundred and sixteen teachers were employed.

### **The Twentieth Century**

About 1909 the State Department of Education started a drive to increase the number of high schools in the state. Leading citizens in each district got behind this movement; and before long, many Preston County towns had this form of education. Many of the so-called grammar schools became high schools under district boards of education. After World War I, a number of schools were added throughout the county. These schools were under the oversight of eight separate district Boards of Education. At that time, there were eight magisterial districts (and eight district Boards) in Preston County, as follows:

1. **Grant district:** Northern Preston County, including Bruceton Mills and Brandonville
2. **Pleasant district:** North central Preston County
3. **Valley district:** Western Preston County in the valley area, including Masontown and Reedsville
4. **Lyon district:** Western Preston County to the south of Valley, including Newburg
5. **Reno district:** Southeastern Preston County, including Fellowsville
6. **Kingwood district:** Central Preston County, including Tunnelton and the county seat Kingwood
7. **Portland district:** Eastern Preston County, including Terra Alta and Albright
8. **Union district:** Southeastern Preston County, including Aurora

Revenue for the district's schools was generated by property taxes levied by that district Board. There was a County Superintendent of Schools who did perform some general oversight of the schools within the county.

The period from 1915 to about 1930 was a noteworthy time, as there was an "explosion" of school construction in the county. Many of the schools built during this time by the district boards remain in use today:

- **Grant District:**
  - Bruceton School **1922**; In use as Bruceton High School until 1991.
  - Bruceton Gymnasium **1930**. **Currently in use** by Bruceton Elementary/Middle School
- **Valley District:**
  - Masontown School **1918**; Later used as Valley High School and West Preston High School. **Currently in use** as West Preston Middle School
  - Reedsville School **1915**; In use until 1992
- **Lyon District:**
  - Lyon District School **1922**. Later used as Newburg High School/Junior High, and Newburg Elementary. Closed after the 1996-97 school year.
  - Independence School **1925**. Closed 1990's.
- **Reno District:**
  - Fellowsville School **1915**; Later used as Fellowsville High School. Closed 1972
  - Rowlesburg School **1910**. In use as Rowlesburg K-12 until 1985 when it sustained extensive flood damage.
- **Kingwood District:**
  - Kingwood High School **1922**. Later served as Central Preston High. **Currently in use** as Central Preston Middle School

- Tunnelton School **1914**. Later used as Tunnelton High School, Central Preston Junior High, and South Preston Junior High. **Curently in use** as South Preston Middle School.
- Portland District:
- Terra Alta School **1925**; Later used as Terra Alta High School and East Preston High School, **Currently in use** as part of East Preston Middle School/Terra Alta Elementary.
- Union District:
- Aurora School **1926**; Served as K-12 school, then Aurora Elemenatry/Jr High.

**Destroyed by fire in 1992**

Preston County, as with the rest of America, enjoyed a period of prosperity after World War I. As can be seen, practically every district built new school which subsequently served as high school for that district.

As one travels through the Preston County today and sees all the school buildings which date from that era, one may wonder how it came to be that such apparant prosperity existed allowing for such a "boom" in spending for education?

To attempt to answer that question, it is important to understand how the district boards generated revenue for their schools. During this time, revenue for the schools was generated almost entirely from local property tax. Each district board could assess a levy for tax dollars to go into each of five funds for the district:

- Elementary teachers: limited by law to 0.4 (40 cents per \$100 valuation).
- Elementary maintainence
- High School teachers - unlimited levy rate
- High School maintainence - unlimited levy rate
- New building construction - unlimited levy rate

In addition, the district boards were prohibited from transferring monies from one fund to another. The emphasis was at the elementary level and there was no expectation that each child would continue education through high school. Thus, funding for High Schools (and the taxation for such) was at the discretion of the district board.

Close examination of the data to follow suggests the following:

- This "building boom" was accompanied by increasing demands for funding for High School education - **a two fold increase in demand for tax dollars.**
- The period of **apparant prosperity after WWI and into the 1920's was short lived.** Post WWI inflation was high. Preston County as well as all of America was heading for the depression of the 1930's.
- County district boards found it impossible to generate enough tax dollars to support its new schools and increased emphasis on High School education, despite increasing real estate valuations and increasing levy rates. Districts which formerly were able to fund its schools entirely with local property tax found it increasingly necessary to apply for state aid as local funds ran short.
- A combination of increased expectations for High School funding, extensive building projects, and the onset of the depression with the 1930's led to a collapse of the "district board" system.

**Increasing Demands for Tax Dollars**

The following data compares the operating budget of Reno District Schools in Preston County, comparing the 1915 budget with the 1925 budget. Similar trends were present in each district in the county.

Reno District, Preston County -- Comparison of District School Budget, 1915 and 1925		
	1915	1925
-		
Salary for Board and Secretary	\$140.00	\$217.00
Institute Attendance	300.00	700.00
Furniture and Fixtures	700.00	3,000.00
Repair/Painting	1,000.00	-
Fuel, Light and Coal	800.00	4950.00
Supplies	200.00	1,500.00

Janitor Service	900.00	3,500.00
Debt	(1) 5,697.05	(3) 18,150.00
Rowlesburg Supplement	(2) 1,651.34	-
Truant Officer	-	500.00
Stationery and postage	-	40.00
Textbooks	-	650.00
Advertising	-	100.00
Insurance	-	450.00
Medical Inspection	-	1,100.00
Delinquent tax	-	4,000.00
<b>TOTAL Excluding teacher salaries</b>	<b>\$11,388.39</b>	<b>\$38,857.00</b>
Elementary Teachers	\$11,775.05	\$30,240.00
	(4) 39 teachers, 6 months	42 teachers, 8 months \$90/month
High School Teachers	3,302.69	(5) 16,875.00
<b>Total Teacher Salaries</b>	<b>\$15,077.74</b>	<b>\$47,115.00</b>
<b>TOTAL Operating Budget</b>	<b>\$25,803.08</b>	<b>(6) \$85,972.00</b>
District Assessed Valuation	\$3,302,635.00	\$4,625,504.00
Levy Rate	0.80 (80 cents per \$100 valuation) Debt Service - 0.20 Building Fund - 0.15 Elementary Teachers - 0.30 High School - 0.10 Rowlesburg dist suppl - 0.05	1.45 (\$1.45 per \$100 valuation) 0.15 Elementary maintenance 0.40 Elementary teachers 0.10 High School maintenance 0.40 High School teachers 0.40 Building fund
Tax Dollars to be collected	\$26,421.08	(6) \$67,069.81

(1) \$8,170.00 outstanding orders, \$663.05 accts payable in salaries, \$5,280.00 new buildings and land, \$1,650 interest. Budget included at 0.2 levy to pay one-third on this debt

(2) Additional levy for the Rowlesburg sub-district to extend the school term in Rowlesburg 2 months

(3) Includes \$750 in misc debt in various categories, \$400 credit coupons, and \$17,000 payment on debt in Building Fund

(4) 25 teachers, #1 certificate, \$50/month, 6 months; 10 teachers, #2 certificate, \$45/month, 6 months; 4 teachers, #3 certificate, \$38/month, 6 months

(5) High School Principal - 9 mo, \$225/mo, \$2025

High School Teachers - 2, \$200/mo, \$3600.00; 2, 175/mo, \$3150.00; 5, 180/mo, \$8100.00

(6) The difference of over \$18,000 in the total budget vs property tax dollars to be raised is accounted for by the following: The elementary teacher expense was in excess of \$30,000. State law allowed a maximum levy rate of 0.4 for this purpose. This rate would return only \$18,502 tax dollars for elementary teachers, resulting in a deficit of approximately \$13,600. In the case of insufficient funds for elementary teachers, the district could apply for state aid to fund the balance. If there was insufficient state aid, the district could then raise the levy rate or assess an additional 0.2 excess levy.

The remainder of the difference is accounted for by funds due from the Sherriff not turned over to the district yet.

Of interest, one may convert the various dollar amounts to 1997 dollars to account for the effects of inflation using an on-line [Inflation Calculator](#). Such calculations reveal the following:

1915 teacher salary with a #1 certificate, \$50/month = \$781.63/month in 1997 dollars

1925 teacher salary of \$90/month = \$827.12/month in 1997 dollars

1915 total operating budget of \$25,803.08 = \$403,368.71 in 1997 dollars

1925 total operating budget of \$85,972.00 = 790,101.18 in 1997 dollars, **an inflation adjusted increase of 96%**

1915 tax dollars collected of \$26,421.08 = \$413,029.64

1925 tax dollars collected of \$67,069.81 = \$616,385.98 in 1997 dollars, **an inflation adjusted increase of 49%**

As the data in the table indicates total operating budget in Reno district increased from \$25,803.08 in 1915 to \$85,972.00 in 1925 - a 233% increase in ten years (inflation

adjusted increase of 96%). The number of tax dollars collected increased from \$26,421.08 to \$67,069.81, a 154% increase (inflation adjusted increase of 49%).

#### **Short lived prosperity**

At graph below illustrates, total county Assessed Valuations steadily increased after WW I. This sharp increase peaked around 1922, and then began to decline, virtually before the mortar on all the new school buildings could dry. As the assessed valuations continued to decline, the district board continued to raise the levy rates. Prior to 1920, levy rates were typically below 1.0 while by the end of the decade of the 1920s levy rates were approaching 1.5 per hundred dollars in all districts.

A survey of the *Preston County Journal*, a weekly newspaper published in Kingwood, serves to enlighten one as to the mood of the time:

#### **From the Preston County Journal 9/1/27**

- Unless there is a radical change by some legislature in the very near future, the policy of the state's giving aid to elementary schools will become a thing of the past. It is breaking down under its own weight. The distribution system was first shot through with "raw deals" that penalize honesty and reward dishonesty. It is impregnated with other evils that work a hardship on some districts for the benefit of other districts and that are unjust to one taxpayer and criminally liberal to another.

Here is the judgment of one who knows: "The situation in the West Virginia schools is just as rotten as Satan will let it be!"

Emphatic words, but there may be a real basis for them. In a general way, and without calling attention to any particular district, here is what is happening: Under the state law districts are allowed to lay a levy of 40 cents on the \$100 valuation for the payment of teacher's salaries in elementary schools. If that 40 cent levy will not raise sufficient funds to run the schools for a minimum of eight months on minimum salaries, the district is entitled to state aid; If, with the amount of state aid available, the funds are still shy, the district board of education is compelled by law to lay an additional levy to make up the deficit -- and this levy is unlimited.

Furthermore, the district is authorized to lay a special levy, not exceeding 20 cents on the \$100 valuation, from which it can also pay salaries. Before this special levy is used however, the district makes a plea for state aid on the ground of "poverty" which is apparently substantiated by the fact that the 40-cent levy does not raise enough funds for the school -- especially if the valuation is so manipulated that it could not raise enough.

Having received state aid because of its poverty, the district then can lay its special levy and raise salaries above the minimum, attracting a better class of teachers because it can pay higher salaries. Meantime, other districts are being taxed more heavily in order that this may be done.

If the politicians cannot get enough money this way, they organize a high school, and there is no limit whatsoever on the levy for this purpose. Teachers, superintendent, supervisors, principals, and other employees can be paid whatever he powers in control wish to pay them. It is believed that in many districts some of the funds from the high school levy are used to pay the salaries of elementary teachers above the minimum required by law otherwise. That this is clearly illegal does not deter the making of such payments

Conditions outlined are not true of all districts, of course, but they are true of a great many; and those which make a practice of such are the responsible parties in breaking down the only system so far devised that gives the boys and girls of West Virginia a chance to at least an elementary education.

Here is a typical illustration. In a district in the southern part of the state last year these levies were laid: 15 cents for building maintenance fund; 47 cents for elementary teachers salaries; 19 cents for new building fund; 20 cents for high school maintenance fund; 47 cents for high school teacher's fund; and 20 ◆ cents for bond redemption fund, making a total levy for educational purposes alone in that one district \$1.68 ◆. It is noteworthy that as much money was raised to the payment of high school teachers as for elementary teachers, yet the latter must far outnumber the former.

As pointed out in a previous article, the total assessed valuation for the state of West Virginia for the current year year is a good many million dollars below what it was last year -- \$34,011,848 to be as exact as possible pending arrival at the tax commissioner's office of final figures from the assessors.

This represents a net falling off in the valuation of real estate of \$23,382,298 and in the valuation of personal property of \$23,777,446. There was a net gain in the valuations placed on public utilities of \$13,147,8896. The grand total last year was \$2,130,255,951; for the current year it will be \$2,096,244,103.

As the decade of the 1920's closed, the public school system in Preston County, and indeed in the entire State, found itself in a financial crisis as expenses continued to rise in the face of a diminishing tax base.

#### **The Modern Period -- County Boards of Education --1933**

The Modern Period started with the county-unit system, although it was inaugurated in the face of economic difficulties and much public opposition. With the 1930's came the depression. Many school terms were being cut short as available funds were depleted, and it was not uncommon for teachers to work for no salary.

The newspapers of the day were full of notices of homes and farms being sold on the courthouse steps for failure to pay taxes. It is small wonder that West Virginians voted to ratify the **tax limitation amendment** in the fall of 1932, which served to place a limit on the amount of property tax which could be levied. While this no doubt did provide some tax relief for the citizens, it only compounded the problems of district boards in raising revenue for their schools. Many historians directly link the tax limitation amendment of 1932 with dissolution of the magisterial district boards and the establishment of the county district system and the county Boards of Education.

This type of school administration was started July 1, 1933 by an act of the West Virginia Legislature, and provided for increased state funding for the maintenance of the schools. As a matter of efficiency for distribution of funds, some 400 state school districts were consolidated into 55 county units.

From the *Preston County Journal* -- March 16, 1933

*(Note: This editorial was written by the county school superintendent, only a few months before the "district board" system was abolished and replaced with the "county board" system. In this editorial, Superintendent Deahl seems to be defending his position to reduce the current school term in order to avoid increasing the debt owed by the district board for salaries in arrears).*

- **School News, by Justus Deahl (Superintendent of Preston County Schools)**

There is an agitation prevalent in Preston county that a certain board of education and the county superintendent are determined to close the schools just for the sake of closing. The board and superintendent have but one object in view and that is to give the children an unmortgaged inheritance. Big business and the larger units of government have failed to point the way to a sound business policy. If the schools fail there is no further recourse. We are doomed to financial bankruptcy. The "pay as you go" plan is the only sensible one for any institution or organization now and in this, why would not the schools be the leaders?

The Chicago teachers are often lauded for their continuance of work without pay for two years. If these teachers expect no financial remuneration they should be listed in the hall of fame. On the other hand, if they expect full pay they are establishing a bad precedent in creating an enormous debt. Just because the other departments plunge heedlessly into debt is no reason why teachers should follow suit or set a like example.

Few people realize the real situation in Preston county. For three months the elementary teachers in Valley district have received "no fund" orders, which are practically worthless until taxes are collected. In Portland, Lyon, Reno, Union, and Kingwood the arrears in salaries are practically two months. By the end of this school term I look for the "no fund" orders to exceed \$100,000. At the present time the total amount for the schools in the entire county is approximately \$70,000. If the people in general know this situation and then demand a full term at any price they are working against the welfare of their children instead of for it. Education that mortgages the future is not education; it is the forerunner of bankruptcy.

As previously noted, the district boards were prohibited from transferring monies from one "fund" to another, unless directed by an act of Legislature and approved by the Governor. Thus, many districts did have monies remaining in building or maintenance funds but were unable to pay salaries as their salary funds were depleted.

From *The Preston County Journal* -- March 23, 1932

- **Schools in Pleasant and Union district have closed, or will close at the end of six months. Funds are exhausted in both districts, and in Union salaries for nearly half the year are still unpaid. A recent check-up of the school situation by the State Department of Education shows that nearly one-half of the elementary schools in the state will be closed before the end of the prescribed term.**

Against this backdrop, the county district system was established effective July 1, 1933. The initial county Boards of Education were appointed by State Superintendent of Schools W.W Trent. The first election for school boards was held in November 1934.

From *The Preston County Journal* -- May 25, 1933

- **Governor Kump's county unit school bill, which has been causing the greatest uproar in the history of legislation, was finally passed by the house Monday by a vote of 55-33. The measure substitutes county school boards of five members, for district and independent district boards.**
- **Selection of county school boards composed of persons "in sympathy with" the county school unit plan was pledged by W.W Trent, (state) superintendent of schools, as he prepared to put the new school system into operation. His promise was issued from an office jammed with politicians, legislators, educators and county delegations urging selection of their candidates for the five-member county boards of education that will supplant the some 400-odd independent and magisterial district boards on July 1.**

From *The Preston County Journal* -- June 29, 1933

- Crossing up the Preston county leaders, Superintendent W.W. Trent picked the county school board which was entirely different from that which was recommended several weeks ago by Superintendent of Schools Justus A. Deahl, and J.V. Gibson, Democratic county chairman.

The county board consists of P.J. Crogan, Democrat, Kingwood; Wilbur Lyons, Democrat, Newburg; Dr. W.H. Post, Democrat, Masontown; L.F. Everhart, Republican, Terra Alta, and Dr. A.G. DeFoe, Republican, Bruceton Mills.

Mr. Crogan is a leading attorney here while Lyons, Dr. Post and Dr. DeFoe are former members of boards of their respective districts. Everhart is an attorney at Terra Alta.

P.J. Crogan announced here this week after learning of his appointment as a member of the school board that he would not qualify for the position. Mr. Crogan said that the appointment came as a complete surprise to him and that he had never been consulted on the subject. (Note: Mr. Crogan was mayor of Kingwood at that time. He was replaced by J.V. Gibson, chairman of the Democratic committee in Preston County).

The newly created Preston County Board of Education began its work in July, 1933. It was noted that state aid would take care of *four months* of school and that the levy would take care of the rest. Actions taken by this first board in the reorganization of the schools included ...

- elimination of 14 high school teaching positions
- elimination of music teachers
- closure of Reedsville High School and Albright High School

In addition, provisions of the reorganization allowed the county boards of education to assume control of funds remaining from the district system, and allowed for transfer of monies from one fund to another -- with the result that funds from the building and maintenance funds could be used to pay salaries.

From *The Preston County Journal* -- July 27, 1933

- The county school board in session practically all of last week, named the school teachers for the county last Friday. Drastic changes were made in several of the schools with Kingwood leading the list. Only four old teachers were rehired in the graded schools here.

Reedsville High School was consolidated with Masontown and Albright High School will be brought to Kingwood.

Fellowsville and Aurora High Schools were left untouched, but the number of teachers were reduced.

Many new teachers will be found in several schools. Practically all of the married teachers were eliminated in Kingwood, with only one remaining in the graded school.

According to Justus A. Deahl, county superintendent, several teachers are yet to be appointed. This will include one more in Newburg and there is also a possibility of a county music director for all schools.

From *The Preston County Journal* -- August 17, 1933

- In their meeting here this week, the Preston County School Board named several more teachers in the county, and also directed that all teachers be paid in full for their time taught last year. Valley district teachers were the one exception as they will not be paid for the last half of the month.

With the closure of Reedsville High School and Albright High School, there remained nine high schools in Preston County:

- Bruceton Mills
- Masontown
- Kingwood
- Terra Alta
- Tunnelton
- Newburg
- Fellowsville
- Rowlesburg
- Aurora

These nine high schools remained until 1971, when Fellowsville was the first of the high schools inherited from the magisterial district boards to be consolidated.

### **The Modern Period -- 1933 to 1960**

It is important to note that while the 1933 reorganization into the county district system did provide for increased state funding of the schools, this funding was mostly limited to salaries and operating expenses. Obtaining revenue for new facility construction remained primarily the responsibility of the counties, to be secured via county bond

referendums which required 60% approval by the voters. While some monies for new school construction were made available from the state from time to time, changes in the configuration of the school system were dependant to a large degree on the suitability of available facilities, which for the most part depended on voter approval of a bond referendum to generate capital for new school construction.

A number of one-room schools were consolidated and closed in Preston County. Between 1933 and 1960, 101 schools were closed in the county. Within this period, a new modern community system was added when the Arthurdale community was formed by the federal government under the watchful eye of Eleanor Roosevelt. This community is now privately owned, and the school is a part of the public school system.

Following World War II, a major effort was made on school improvement with the passage of a bond issue in 1946. This building program was continued in the 1950's with special levy funds. School programs, particularly at the secondary level, were expanded; and the smaller elementary schools were consolidated into larger units.

### **The Modern Period -- Research and planning -- the 1960's**

As West Virginia approached its centennial in 1963, the Preston County Board of Education entered into a period of research and planning. The county board of education had been in existence for 30 years. Many of the facilities, inherited from the old district board system, were beginning to show their age and the board recognized the need for a sound educational strategy to facilitate late 20th century expectations.

Beginning in 1960, six significant studies were made in Preston County which have had implications for the educational program.

- In 1960, the Bureau of Educational Research and Service of Ohio State University reported on a study of the school buildings in the county. Although the Board did not present a bond issue for construction at that time, they, none-the-less, did implement many of the recommendations of the study, especially as it related to elementary schools.
- In 1963 the staff of the Research and Field services Department at West Virginia University conducted a survey of "Attitudes and Opinions of Preston County Voters" on a variety of matters, including schools.
- In 1965 the Board of Education commissioned Dr. Robert Baldwin and Dr. Howard Allen to conduct a study of the secondary schools in the county. This plan was never implemented.
- On June 1, 1967, the county received a planning grant under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to develop an innovative educational program for Preston County. This so-called "Project D.A.V.E." plan, completed in 1968, called for a number of changes in the curriculum and school organization in the county. Many of the curricular changes recommended were implemented, but the school reorganization plan became a hotbed of controversy, primarily because it called for a single senior high school for the county, which then had nine high schools (Bruceton, Kingwood, Valley, Terra Alta, Tunnelton, Aurora, Fellowsville, Rowlesburg, Newburg). This plan was never implemented.
- A vocational education survey of the county was conducted in 1968 to determine the employment fields in which training was needed in the county. This study formed the basis of the curriculum for the **Preston County Educational Center (PCEC)** when it was established in 1972. The PCEC, constructed as a vocational-technical school, is located in Kingwood, on the "county farm" -- property owned by the County Commission which in times past served as the county "poor farm."
- The Educational Administration and Facilities Unit of Ohio State University developed a plan for the Board of Education in 1971. This report was made at a time when the Board was in the process of reorganization and when plans developed by outside experts had become a very controversial subject in Preston County. Therefore, no attempt was made to implement it, although it contained several elements that were incorporated in later building plans.

Citizens' Involvement

Citizen involvement in the process of planning the educational program has a long history in Preston County. During the early and middle 1960's, a number of citizens' committees were formed to study various aspects of the school programs. Citizens from all parts of the county were involved in setting goals for the D.A.V.E. project in 1967, and a series of 18 meetings was held throughout the county during 1967 and 1968 to obtain input from citizens. During 1968 and 1969, employers throughout the county were involved in the study of the present and projected job possibilities in the county, which helped serve as the basis for the curriculum for the countywide vocational-technical school, Preston County Education Center, (PCEC) which was placed in operation in September 1972.

### **The Modern Period -- School Bond Elections and Consolidation -- the 1970's**

In 1972, Fellowsville High School closed and its high school students were incorporated into Newburg High School, resulting in eight high schools, all sharing the PCEC. Over the next several years, further school realignment was dictated by available facilities, most of which were of early 20th century design and were becoming increasingly difficult to make conform with late 20th century educational requirements.

The new Board which took office in January, 1973, was committed to develop a school building plan to submit to the people of the county in a bond referendum. The board, on April 9, 1973, formally asked for input from citizens' committees representing the various communities in the county. By June of 1973, the Board had held nine meetings with groups from most of the major communities in the county. On the basis of this input, the board formulated a school building plan and submitted it to the people in a bond referendum on September 18, 1973. This was the first of many county or local bond referendums to be submitted to the voters of Preston County.

**9/18/73** -- REJECTED, 46.6% favorable: \$4.9 million for new construction, to consolidate the then eight high schools into four:

- 1) Kingwood-Masontown Valley (located in Valley district)
- 2) Tunnelton-Newburg-Fellowsville (located between Tunnelton and Fellowsville on Rt. 26)
- 3) Terra Alta-Aurora-Rowlesburg (located in Terra Alta)
- 4) Bruceton (located in Bruceton)

Following the defeat of this bond proposal, the board continued meeting with a number of citizen groups. In February, 1974, the Board requested the Preston County Education Association to select a committee composed of one teacher from each school to work with the Board on the development of a new school plan. Prior to the bond election, the Board held meetings in all major Preston County communities to explain the plan. An extensive campaign was again waged in the media to explain the plan. Citizen volunteers took information door-to-door in an effort to reach all the residents of the county. This referendum was held on October 8, 1974.

**10/8/74** -- REJECTED, 57.28% favorable (at that time, 60% was required for passage): In comparison to the failed bond of 1973, this bond would have provided for:

- 1) Kingwood students returned to Kingwood
- 2) Rowlesburg combined with Kingwood instead of Terra Alta
- 3) Tunnelton-Newburg-Fellowsville high school abandoned
- 4) Provision for consolidation of the then eight high schools into six high schools in Kingwood, Terra Alta, Bruceton, Tunnelton, Newburg, and Valley.

With the narrow defeat of this bond proposal, many citizens petitioned the Board to resubmit the plan in the hope that it would receive the additional support need for passage. The Board changed the location of one school and resubmitted the proposed bond on November 23, 1974.

**11/23/74** -- REJECTED, 49.2% favorable:

This bond was similar to the previous, with the location of the proposed new elementary school for Tunnelton, Newburg, and Fellowsville moved to or closer to Fellowsville.

#### **The Better School Buildings Amendment of 1972**

In 1972, a *statewide* bond referendum was passed by the voters of West Virginia, which provided for \$200 million to be allocated to the various counties for new school construction.

The Board of Education, in February, 1975, after the failure of three county bond referendums, developed and presented to the State Board of Education a Comprehensive Facilities Plan to obtain \$3.2 million dollars for school building construction and renovation, from the monies available from the Better School Buildings Amendment. This plan was to result in consolidation of the then eight high schools into five. Upon submission of this plan, much opposition grew throughout the county, particularly in those areas where the high schools were being removed from the community. Requests were presented to Dr. Daniel B. Taylor, State Superintendent of Schools, for a hearing regarding the plan as presented. Groups representing both sides of the issue presented their views at the hearing on April 5, 1975 in Charleston. On June 13, 1975, the State Board of Education, meeting in Ripley, approved the plan as presented, and immediate implementation by the local Board was begun.

During the latter part of February, 1976, just as the Board was in the process of accepting the bids on the various construction projects, the controversy accelerated to the point that the Board of Education agreed to hold another local bond referendum, specifying seven high schools, with considerable input from a highly active citizens group. This bond proposal, referred to as the "deconsolidation bond" was presented on 5/11/76.

**5/11/76** -- REJECTED, 47.9% favorable: \$6.4 million.

This bond, referred to as the "deconsolidation bond," would have provided for construction to facilitate seven high schools, located in Aurora, Terra Alta, Rowlesburg, Kingwood, Bruceton, Tunnelton-Newburg, and Valley.

With rejection of the "deconsolidation bond," the Board of Education proceeded with its comprehensive facilities plan which called for closure of high schools at Aurora, Tunnelton, and Newburg. With the opening of the 1977-78 school term, Aurora High School was closed and was combined with Terra Alta High School to form **East Preston Senior High**; Newburg High School was closed and was combined with Valley High School to form **West Preston High School**. Tunnelton High School was closed and those students, along with the students from the Fellowsville area, were combined with Kingwood High School to form **Central Preston High School**. **Bruceton High School** and **Rowlesburg** remained, resulting in five high schools.

The 1970's closed after a decade of failed bond referendums, heated debate of the consolidation controversy, and the formation of five consolidated high schools over the protests of many. The opening of the reorganized consolidated high schools with the 1977-78 term was accompanied by significant protests and demonstrations at the school sites. In some cases, police escorts were provided for the school busses entering the campuses. The furor died down in a few weeks, as Preston County settled in to its reorganized high schools.

### **The Modern Period -- Further reorganization -- the 1980's**

The decade of the 1980's began with significant wounds in need of healing as a result of the consolidation controversy. The coal mining industry and railroads had long since reached their peak and no longer had the economic impact which they had provided 30 to 40 years prior. The population of Preston County declined from 31,399 in 1950 to 29,037 in 1990 (-8%). The county school enrollment was in steady decline at the rate of approximately 10% per ten years, a decline which has been constant for the last 30 to 40 years. (Note: Enrollment in grades 1-12 for 1965-66 was 6767; for 1995-96, 1-12 enrollment was 4966, for a decrease of 1801 students in that 30 year period, a 27% decrease). With state funding for schools tied to enrollment, Preston County found itself each year attempting to maintain the status quo with an ever diminishing level of revenue. In addition, new regulations regarding the number of pupils permitted per classroom, the provision for duty-free planning periods, additional fire code and safety regulations, a concerted statewide effort to reduce the number of funded school personnel, and a host of other fiscal imperatives only multiplied the financial constraints facing the board.

The Board of Education continued in its efforts to find support for new school construction via county bond referendums. Bond referendums were held on March 5, 1984 and October 26, 1985 -- these failed with voter approval of 45% and 38% respectively.

Two events occurred in the mid 1980's which ultimately had significant impact on the Preston County School system. Federal funding was obtained to construct **a new school facility** which came to be known as the **Preston County Academic Center (PCAC)**. This was a facility containing the most modern laboratories and classroom space built to accommodate upper level science, math, and other college preparatory classes. The PCAC was located adjacent to the vocational school (PCEC) in Kingwood on the "county farm," and, like the vocational school, was shared by all five existing high schools in the county. Thus, the situation presented such that many students would spend only half a day in their home high school, and spend the other half at either PCEC or PCAC.

**The Cheat river flood of 1985**, the worst flood in the past 100 years, resulted in damage to Rowlesburg school, a K-12 facility, to the point that it was declared structurally unfit for continued use as a school. As a result, federal disaster (FEMA) funds became available for the construction of a new school to serve the students in the Rowlesburg attendance area. As a result of citizen petition, yet another bond referendum was held on July 31, 1986. This referendum, referred to as the "southern high school" bond, would have, with the addition of the FEMA funds, allowed for construction of a new "South Preston High School" for the Tunnelton-Newburg-Fellowsville area, a new Rowlesburg K-12 facility, a new Central Preston High School, and a new Bruceton High School. As with the other bond referendums, this also failed, garnering a 38% favorable vote.

After the defeat of this bond, the Preston County Board of Education closed Rowlesburg High School and transferred its students to Central Preston High School in Kingwood. The FEMA funds were used to construct a new K-9 facility in Rowlesburg, and a portion of the FEMA funds was used to construct an addition to the Academic Center at the county farm. This addition was, for a time, used for Central Preston High School grades 11 and 12, which included the displaced students from Rowlesburg. While the new school construction was in progress at Rowlesburg, FEMA also supplied Preston County with several portable modular classrooms, which were set up as a temporary school in Rowlesburg. After the new school was completed, these modular classrooms were purchased by the board of education at a reduced cost.

Thus, at the end of the 1980's, the Board of Education found itself no closer to passing a local bond referendum than in the early 1970's. It did have, however, have many of the elements needed for a new comprehensive high school for the entire county in place in Kingwood at the "county farm" -- namely the Vocational School (PCEC), constructed largely from federal funds and newly constructed in the early 1970's; the Academic Center (PCAC) with its science and language laboratories, constructed from federal funds in the 1980's, the Central Preston High School addition to the PCAC, constructed with FEMA funds; and several portable modular classrooms which could be pressed into service and used for classroom space.

Further meetings were held in the various communities in late 1988, and early in 1989 five committees were formed, with representatives from the central administrative staff, school personnel, and citizens, to examine the areas of

enrollment projections, facilities, transportation, finances, and curriculum. These committees worked through the spring and summer of 1989, and their findings and recommendations were widely discussed and debated throughout the county.

Having received the reports, the **Preston County Board of Education, on September 18, 1989, voted to consolidate its remaining four high school into a single high school serving grades 10-12 effective the 1991-92 school term.** The new comprehensive high school was to be located in Kingwood at the PCEC/PCAC complex, with or without the addition of any additional construction. Plans called for the use of the portable modular classrooms, procured from FEMA, if needed at the new high school. The motion also called for the existing high schools to be converted to junior high schools serving grades 7-9, and maintenance of the existing elementary schools. Furthermore, plans called for incorporation of the 9th grade into the high school within five years, and conversion to a K-4/5, 4/5-8, 9-12 arrangement throughout the county.

### **December 16, 1989 -- Preston County passes a local bond referendum.**

Having acted to establish a single county high school effective in 1991-92, the Preston County Board of Education placed another bond referendum before the voters on December 16, 1989. This was the eighth bond referendum to be proposed since 1973. A vigorous campaign was mounted, and the referendum passed by a 55% majority. The total amount of the bond issue was \$8.8 million, with proceeds as follows:

- \$6.4 million to build and equip the new Preston County High School, to be incorporated with the existing PCAC/PCEC facility in Kingwood.
- \$1.3 million to build and equip a new junior high facility in the Bruceton attendance area
- \$614,000 for renovations to Bruceton Elementary school
- \$200,000 for renovations at Terra Alta Junior High
- \$298,000 to construct and equip an addition to the Terra Alta elementary building.

### **The Modern Period -- Further reorganization -- the 1990's**

The 1990's have brought the establishment of Preston High as a single comprehensive high school for the county. The high school "consolidation issue" has been apparently put to rest. Further school reorganization occurred with the closure of Albright Elementary and Newburg Elementary. The 1990's also brought a far reaching new school construction plan implemented by the State of West Virginia, with the establishment of the **State Building Authority (SBA)**. The SBA program has made funds available to the counties for new school construction via bond sales at the state level. Preston County has made use of SBA funds to supplement local bond monies in the construction of Preston High School. In addition, SBA funding has provided for a new elementary school for the Tunnelton-Denver area, and a new K-8 facility at Aurora to replace the school there destroyed by fire in 1993, major building repair at several facilities, and additional construction at Preston High to incorporate the 9th grade. Most recently, SBA funds have been approved for major renovation and construction to put Valley Elementary School under one roof at the Arthurdale site.

### **The 21st Century -- the 2000's and beyond**

As Preston County enters the 21st Century, there is a palpable sense of optimism regarding its school system. Of the currently operated twelve schools, during the past decades new constructions have occurred at the Aurora School(PreK-6), Rowlesburg School(PreK-8) and at Tunnelton-Denver(K-5). With the passage in November 2006 of a three year maintenance Levy, funds are available to address facility needs at each of the twelve schools.

In January of 2007, structural inspections required students attending Central Preston Middle School (High/Price Street in Kingwood) to be housed at Preston High School. This need, under the leadership of Superintendent John Lofink, expedited the Local Board of Education to re-examine the Comprehensive Facilities Plan (CFP) for Preston County Schools. At recent county meetings in January 2007 (January 11 for Kingwood area, January 12 for the Valley area and January 19 for the Southern area of Preston County), the local board began considering amending the 10 year CFP. Working closely with the West Virginia Department of Education and the School Building Authority, the Preston County Board of Education focused upon the three most significant facilities for improvement. Those areas were the Kingwood area for a new PreK-8 school for Kingwood Elementary and Central Preston Middle: Valley area for the addition of West Preston Middle School grades 6-8 at the current Valley Elementary site, and the Southern area for South Preston Middle, Tunnelton-Denver and Fellowsville Elementary Schools. Current Schools at Bruceton, Terra-Alta/East Preston, Rowlesburg, Preston High School and Aurora will remain with yearly Levy improvements.

Anticipated combined support between the local citizens of Preston County and the State School Building Authority, has created a more clearer long-range vision for our students to meet the educational demands of the 21st Century.