

West Virginia Fun Facts and Trivia

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State Animal:

The Black Bear, or *Ursus americanus*, is actually deeply tinted with brown. The black bear roams freely throughout 36 states and Canada, while its West Virginia habitat primarily is in the eastern mountain region of the state. One or two cubs, rarely three, are born at a time, weighing about eight ounces each. The adult reaches an average maximum weight of 250 pounds.

State Bird:

The Cardinal, or *Cardinalis cardinalis*, became West Virginia's official bird by Concurrent Resolution of the 1949 Legislature. The male of the species is a rich scarlet color with a mask and shading of black, while the young and the females are a less brilliant color. The cardinal measures approximately eight inches long and is found from New York state to the Gulf of Mexico and as far west as Oklahoma.

State Butterfly:

The Monarch Butterfly was designated West Virginia's official state butterfly on March 1, 1995, by the Legislature, after declaration by Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 11. The orange and black insect dines on milkweed as a caterpillar, sips nectar from flowers as a butterfly and, at summer's end, migrates south to Mexico. The butterflies you see in the spring are the great grandchildren of the ones that lived in Mexico during the winter.

State Fish:

The Brook Trout, a West Virginia native fish, is perhaps the most-sought-after trout by anglers, as it puts up an excellent fight for its size. It thrives in small, cold, spring-fed streams and is unable to withstand warmer temperatures. The brook trout is olive with lighter sides and a reddish belly (in males) and is easily identified by the light-colored edges of the lower fins. Its hatchery growth averages six to eight inches in length soon after birth.

State Flag

By Senate Joint Resolution Number 18, approved by the Legislature March 7, 1929, West Virginia adopted the present State Flag. The resolution in part is as follows: "That the Legislature of West Virginia hereby adopts a State Flag of the following design and proportions, to-wit:

The proportions of the flag of the State of West Virginia shall be the same as those of the United States ensign; the field shall be pure white, upon the center of which shall be emblazoned in proper colors, the coat-of arms of the State of West Virginia upon which appears the date of the admission of the State into the Union, also with the motto, 'Montani Semper Liberi' (Mountaineers Are Always Free). Above the coat-of-arms of the State of West Virginia there shall be a ribbon lettered, 'State of West Virginia,' and arranged appropriately around the lower part of the coat-of-arms of the State of West Virginia a wreath of Rhododendron maximum in proper colors. The field of pure white shall be bordered by a strip of blue on four sides. The flag of the State of West Virginia when used for parade purposes shall be trimmed with gold colored fringe on three sides and when used on ceremonial occasions with the United States ensign, shall be trimmed and mounted in similar fashion to the United States flag as regards fringe, cord, tassels, and mounting."

State Flower:

The *Rhododendron maximum*, or "great laurel," is the state flower of West Virginia. It was selected on January 29, 1903, by the Legislature, following a vote by pupils of the public schools. It is a shrub of the heath family and may be recognized by its large, dark evergreen leaves and delicate pale pink or white bloom, mottled with either red or yellow flecks.

State Fruit: Golden Delicious Apple. Designated as the official state fruit by Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 7, adopted by the Legislature on February 20, 1995. Anderson Mullins discovered this apple variety in Clay County in 1905. The plain apple had been previously designated as the official state fruit by House Concurrent Resolution No. 56, adopted March 7, 1972.

State Tree:

The Sugar Maple, or *Acer saccharum*, became West Virginia's official tree by a resolution of the 1949 Legislature. Its wood is excellent for furniture, and it produces maple syrup. A single tree is 70-120 feet high and produces two to three pounds of sugar. It has a five-lobed leaf and a small wing-shaped seed pod and, in the fall, the leaves turn brilliant colors.

State Insect:

The Honeybee became West Virginia's official state insect in 2002 by the Legislature's Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 9. In addition to its flavorful honey, the honeybee pollinates many of the state's most important crops including fruits, vegetables and grasses. Its activity produces more benefit to the state's economy than any other insect. The honeybee has six legs, four wings and its coloring ranges from dark yellow to gold with three dark bands on its abdomen.

State Seal:

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More Official State Facts

State Nickname:

"The Mountain State"

State Songs:

The West Virginia Hills, words and music by Ellen King and H.E. Engle; This is My West Virginia, by Iris Bell; and West Virginia, My Home Sweet Home by Julian G. Hearne, Jr. Adopted by the Legislature as official songs February 28, 1963.

State Day:

June 20th. West Virginia was proclaimed a state in 1863. "West Virginia Day" became a legal holiday by Chapter 59, Acts of the Legislature, Regular Session, 1927.

State Gem:

The State Gem is technically not a gemstone, but rather the silicified Mississippian Fossil Coral, *Lithostrotionella*, preserved as the siliceous mineral chalcedony. Designated by House Concurrent Resolution No. 39, March 10, 1990. It is found in Hillsdale Limestone in portions of Greenbrier and Pocahontas counties and is often cut and polished for jewelry and display.

State Soil:

The state soil is Monongahela Silt Loam, adopted by concurrent resolution in 1997, making West Virginia the 12th state to have an official state soil.

Official Colors:

Old Gold and Blue were designated as official state colors by Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 20, adopted by the Legislature on March 8, 1963.

More Random Fun Facts.

- West Virginia is the only state in the Union to have acquired its sovereignty by proclamation of the President of the United States.

- West Virginia is considered the southern most northern state and the northern most southern state.

- Mother's Day was first observed at Andrews Church in Grafton on May 10, 1908.
- West Virginia has the oldest population of any state. The median age is 40.
- Jackson's Mill is the site of the first 4-H Camp in the United States.
- The world's largest sycamore tree is located on the Back Fork of the Elk River in Webster Springs.
- The first state sales tax in the United States went into effect in West Virginia on July 1, 1921.
- On January 26, 1960 Danny Heater, a student from Burnsville, scored 135 points in a high school basketball game earning him a place in the Guinness Book of World Records.
- The first federal prison exclusively for women in the United States was opened in 1926 in West Virginia.
- Cecil Underwood is the nation's oldest governor. He turned 77 on November 5, 1999.
- The New River Gorge Bridge near Fayetteville is the second highest steel arch bridge in the United States. The bridge is also the longest steel arch bridge (1,700 feet) in the world. Every October on Bridge Day, the road is closed and individuals parachute and bungee cord jump 876 feet off the bridge. It's West Virginia's largest single day event and attracts about 100,000 people each year.
- The first major land battle fought between Union and Confederate soldiers in the Civil War was the Battle of Philippi on June 3, 1861.
- One of the nation's oldest and largest Indian burial grounds is located in Moundsville. Its 69 feet high, 900 feet in circumference, and 50 feet high. An inscribed stone was removed from the vault and is on display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.
- West Virginia's nickname is the Mountain State and its motto is "Mountaineers Are Always Free."
- Some famous individuals from West Virginia include: Pearl Buck (author), Peter Marshall (television host), Chuck Yeager (test pilot /Air Force General), Don Knotts (actor), Mary Lou Retton (Olympic gold medalist for gymnastics), and Kathy Mattea (country music singer).
- Nearly 75% of West Virginia is covered by forests.

- West Virginia covers about 24,000 square miles and has a population of about 1.8 million.
- 15% of the nation's total coal production comes from West Virginia.
- According to the crime index for 1997, West Virginia had the lowest crime rate in the country.
- West Virginia's Memorial Tunnel was the first in the nation to be monitored by television. It opened November 8, 1954.
- The first rural free mail delivery was started in Charles Town on October 6, 1896, and then spread throughout the United States.
- West Virginia was the first state to have a sales tax. It became effective July 1, 1921.
- The first steamboat was launched by James Rumsey in the Potomac River at New Mecklenburg (Shepherdstown) on December 3, 1787.
- A naval battle was fought in West Virginia waters during the Civil War. United States Navy armored steamers were actively engaged in the Battle of Buffington Island near Ravenswood on July 19, 1863.
- On February 14, 1824, at Harpers Ferry, John S. Gallaher published the "Ladies Garland," one of the first papers in the nation devoted mainly to the interests of women.
- Organ Cave, near Ronceverte, is the third largest cave in the United States and the largest in the state.
- A variety of the yellow apple, the Golden Delicious, originated in Clay County. The original Grimes Golden Apple Tree was discovered in 1775 near Wellsburg.
- West Virginia has an mean altitude of 1,500 feet, giving it the highest average altitude east of the Mississippi.
- The first iron furnace west of the Alleghenies was built by Peter Tarr on Kings Creek in 1794.
- One of the first suspension bridges in the world was completed in Wheeling in November 1849.
- Outdoor advertising had its origin in Wheeling about 1908 when the Block Brothers Tobacco Company painted bridges

and barns with the wording: "Treat Yourself to the Best, Chew Mail Pouch."

- Moundsville is the site of the continent's largest cone-shaped prehistoric burial mound. It is 69 feet high and 900 feet in circumference at the base and was opened on March 19, 1838.

- The first electric railroad in the world, built as a commercial enterprise, was constructed between Huntington and Guyandotte.

- On September 10, 1938, the Mingo Oak, largest and oldest white oak tree in the United States, was declared dead and felled with ceremony.

- Coal House, the only residence in the world built entirely of coal, is located in White Sulphur Springs. The house was occupied on June 1, 1961.

- The world's largest shipment of matches (20 carloads or 210,000,000 matches) was shipped from Wheeling to Memphis, Tennessee, on August 26, 1933.

- Daniel Boone made his last survey of Charleston on September 8, 1798. He left the state in 1799.

- William Tompkins used natural gas to evaporate salt brine in 1841, thus becoming the first person in the United States to use natural gas for industrial purposes.

- The last public hanging in West Virginia was held in Jackson County in December 1897.

- The first glass plant in West Virginia was at Wellsburg in 1815. The first pottery plant was in Morgantown in 1785.

- In May 1860, the first well in the state for producing crude oil was drilled at Burning Springs.

- Stone that was quarried near Hinton was contributed by West Virginia for the Washington Monument and arrived in Washington in February 1885.

- West Virginia University was established on February 7, 1867 under the name of "Agricultural College of West Virginia."

- Bailey Brown, the first Union soldier killed in the Civil War, died on May 22, 1861, at Fetterman, Taylor County.

- On May 31, 1910, the Supreme Court held that the Maryland-West Virginia boundary was the low-water mark of the

south bank of the Potomac River.

- The first spa open to the public was at Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, in 1756 (then, Bath, Virginia).
- The Christian Church was begun in West Virginia by Alexander Campbell in Bethany.
- Mrs. Minnie Buckingham Harper, a member of the House of Delegates by appointment in 1928, was the first African American woman to become a member of a legislative body in the United States.
- Chester Merriman of Romney was the youngest soldier of World War I, having enlisted at the age of 14.
- The first brick street in the world was laid in Charleston, West Virginia, on October 23, 1870, on Summers Street, between Kanawha and Virginia Streets.

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