

history of parkersburg wv

History of Parkersburg, WV

Parkersburg, West Virginia, located at the confluence of the Ohio and Little Kanawha Rivers, has a rich and diverse history that reflects the broader narrative of American development from indigenous habitation to industrialization and modern urban growth. Established in the late 18th century, this city has evolved through various phases, shaping its unique identity in the heart of Appalachia. This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Parkersburg's history, highlighting its early settlement, economic development, significant events, and cultural evolution.

Early Settlement and Indigenous Peoples

Before European settlers arrived, the area now known as Parkersburg was inhabited by Native American tribes, particularly the Shawnee and Delaware. The fertile lands and abundant resources of the region made it an attractive location for these indigenous peoples.

- Shawnee Tribe: The Shawnee were known for their hunting and agricultural practices, establishing seasonal camps along the rivers.
- Delaware Tribe: The Delaware people were also prominent in the area, engaging in trade and agriculture.

The first European settlers arrived in the late 18th century, drawn by the promise of land and opportunity. In 1770, a hunter named John Peter S. Parker explored the region and later returned, bringing settlers with him. In 1785, Parker established a trading post, which would eventually grow into the city of Parkersburg.

Founding of Parkersburg

Parkersburg was officially founded in 1800 and named in honor of John Peter S. Parker. The founding of Parkersburg was significant for several reasons:

- Strategic Location: Its position at the confluence of two rivers provided a natural transportation hub, facilitating trade and travel.
- Growth of Commerce: The establishment of the town attracted merchants and settlers, leading to rapid economic growth.

In 1820, Parkersburg was incorporated as a town, and by 1860, it had developed into a bustling hub with a population of about 2,500.

The 19th Century: Growth and Industrialization

The 19th century was a transformative period for Parkersburg, characterized by significant

economic growth, the arrival of the railroad, and the impact of the Civil War.

Economic Development

Throughout the 1800s, Parkersburg became a center for various industries, including:

- Lumber: The region's vast forests provided ample resources for lumber mills, contributing to the development of the local economy.
- Oil and Natural Gas: The discovery of oil in the early 19th century led to the establishment of oil refineries, further boosting the economy.
- Manufacturing: Various manufacturing enterprises emerged, producing goods ranging from textiles to machinery.

The city's strategic location along the rivers and its burgeoning industries made it a vital economic center in West Virginia.

The Civil War Era

During the Civil War, Parkersburg played a crucial role due to its location and resources. The city was a significant supply depot for Union troops, and its industries were key to the war effort. Several notable events occurred during this time:

- Military Encampments: Parkersburg hosted various military encampments, providing support to Union forces.
- Divided Loyalties: As in many border areas, the population was divided in its loyalties, leading to tensions and conflicts within the community.

Despite the war's impact, Parkersburg continued to grow, and by the end of the 19th century, it was emerging as a prominent city in West Virginia.

The 20th Century: Urbanization and Social Change

The early 20th century marked a new era for Parkersburg, characterized by urbanization, social change, and the challenges of the Great Depression.

Urban Development

In the early 1900s, Parkersburg expanded rapidly. The population swelled as people moved to the city for jobs in various industries. Key developments included:

- Infrastructure Improvements: Roads, bridges, and public buildings were constructed to accommodate the growing population.
- Cultural Institutions: The establishment of libraries, theaters, and museums contributed to the

cultural fabric of the city.

By 1930, Parkersburg's population had reached over 30,000, making it one of the largest cities in West Virginia.

The Great Depression and Its Aftermath

The Great Depression brought significant economic challenges to Parkersburg. Many industries faced closures, and unemployment rose sharply. However, the city's resilience shone through:

- New Deal Programs: Federal programs aimed at economic recovery provided jobs and infrastructure improvements.
- Community Initiatives: Residents came together to support one another, fostering a strong sense of community.

In the years following the Depression, Parkersburg began to recover, and the post-war era brought renewed growth and prosperity.

Modern Era: Challenges and Resilience

The late 20th and early 21st centuries have presented both challenges and opportunities for Parkersburg. Economic shifts, population changes, and the rise of new industries have shaped the city's trajectory.

Economic Transition

As traditional industries declined, Parkersburg faced economic challenges. The manufacturing sector saw significant job losses, leading to a population decline. However, the city has worked to diversify its economy by emphasizing:

- Healthcare: The establishment of hospitals and medical centers has created new jobs and attracted residents.
- Education: Local educational institutions have played a crucial role in workforce development and community engagement.
- Tourism: Efforts to promote the city's historical and cultural attractions have bolstered tourism.

Community and Cultural Revitalization

In recent years, Parkersburg has experienced a cultural renaissance. Initiatives to preserve historical sites, enhance public spaces, and promote the arts have revitalized the community. Key efforts include:

- Historic Preservation: Organizations and local government have worked to preserve the city's

historic architecture and landmarks.

- Cultural Events: Festivals and events celebrating local culture and heritage have fostered community pride and engagement.

Conclusion

The history of Parkersburg, West Virginia, is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of its people. From its early days as a trading post to its rise as an industrial center and its ongoing efforts to navigate modern challenges, Parkersburg has continually evolved. As the city moves forward, it carries with it a rich heritage that reflects the broader narrative of American history, characterized by innovation, community spirit, and a commitment to progress. The future of Parkersburg remains bright, as it builds on its historical foundations to forge a new path for its residents and future generations.

Frequently Asked Questions

What year was Parkersburg, WV established?

Parkersburg was established in 1800.

Who was Parkersburg named after?

Parkersburg was named after Alexander Parker, who was one of the early settlers.

What significant event in American history impacted Parkersburg during the Civil War?

During the Civil War, Parkersburg was a strategic supply point and saw the formation of several military units, impacting the local economy and population.

What role did the oil and gas industry play in Parkersburg's development?

The oil and gas industry played a crucial role in Parkersburg's economic growth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, attracting workers and businesses to the area.

What historical landmark in Parkersburg is listed on the National Register of Historic Places?

The Blennerhassett Island Historical State Park is one of the notable landmarks in Parkersburg listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

How did Parkersburg contribute to the manufacturing sector in West Virginia?

Parkersburg became a hub for manufacturing, particularly in glass and chemicals, which significantly contributed to West Virginia's industrial development.

What is the significance of the Parkersburg Homecoming Festival?

The Parkersburg Homecoming Festival is significant as it celebrates the city's history, culture, and community, attracting visitors and promoting local pride.

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