The Town of Douglas was founded in 1891 by William and Douglas Gorman, who ran the Cumberland Coal and Coke Company, a subsidiary of Davis Coal and Coke. The town is located two miles down the North Fork of the Blackwater from Thomas, and just above Douglas Falls.

Douglas was a coal and lumber town, where 175 coke ovens lit up the night sky. At its peak in 1910, Douglas had a population of 900. Coal miners came from Russia, Austria, Germany, Poland, Ireland, England, Italy, Hungary, Lithuania, Serbia, and Mexico. From 1891 to 1938, a dozen deep mines operated, the last one closing in 1954.

The coal company had its own power plant and company doctor who lived in town. The company store was located along the railroad tracks, as well as a depot, post office, and barber shop run by Frank Colabrese. "Barber Shop Falls" below Douglas is named for his business. A railroad line for lumber climbed the steep hillside across from Douglas to Davis, along the brink of the Blackwater Canyon.

Douglas was the first level spot at the top of the steep Canyon railroad grade. Coal trains coming up from Parsons first stopped in Hendricks, to add helper engines. During the seven-mile trip (which took 40 minutes), sand was blown under the wheels to give the engines a better grip. Passenger cars came by four times a day.

Douglas today is on the edge of the Monongahela National Forest, which can be accessed on Forest Road 18 on the edge of town, or on the old railroad grade from Thomas to Hendricks. We will feature Douglas in our 2019 historic signage project.

Thanks to Rachelle Davis, Jim Baczuk and Mr Crawford for help with this article, and to FOB supporters who make this work possible.
On December 1, 2018, Friends of Blackwater and the West Virginia University Center for Energy and Sustainable Development will present a free day-long conference on energy and climate issues. Thanks to all the FOB supporters who have helped make this unique program possible.

We are very excited to have Emily Calandrelli, a Morgantown native and Emmy-nominated science TV host, as the keynote speaker!

Calandrelli is featured as a correspondent on the Netflix series “Bill Nye Saves the World”, and Executive Producer and host of FOX’s “Xploration Outer Space”, which airs in 100 million households each week. She is also the author of the popular children’s book series, “Ada Lace Adventures” which promotes STEM literacy among young children.

More than 15 experts will speak about recent climate change developments and issues. Topics include climate change communication, controlling methane emissions, solar opportunities and obstacles, and putting a price on carbon.

The program will be held from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM at the West Virginia University College of Law Event Hall, Evansdale Campus, Morgantown, WV. Conference registration is free and includes a buffet networking luncheon from 12:00 noon to 1:00 PM. Free parking is onsite.

Cathy Norton from the West Virginia Health Sciences and Technology Academy (HSTA), will give welcoming remarks. HSTA encourages West Virginian students to pursue careers in science and technology. Friends of Blackwater has been presenting fun “Kitchen Klimate Science” programs to hundreds of West Virginia students in HSTA clubs.

Please save your place and RSVP at https://saveblackwater.org/conference-page/ by November 16, 2018. And please share this information with others you know who are concerned about climate change. We want to see them, too!

For more information, contact Logan Thorne at logan.thorne.lt@gmail.com, or FOB at 304-345-7663.

Friends of Blackwater Comments on Forest Service Projects

Friends of Blackwater recently submitted comments on two proposed timbering projects in the Monongahela National Forest, the Spruce Mountain Grouse Management Area Project and the Big Rock Project. The Spruce Mountain GMA proposes timbering 82 acres of West Virginia northern flying squirrel habitat. We asked them to drop this proposal to protect “Ginny’s” mountain home and high mountain streams at Spruce Knob and the Sinks of Gandy. New roads, skid roads and log landings associated with Big Rock Project would also cause soil erosion and sedimentation of streams. This could impact the candy darter and the hellbender in the Monongahela National Forest’s high mountain streams near the Cranberry Wilderness. Friends of Blackwater commented that these projects should be withdrawn and re-evaluated. Thanks so much to the Center for Biological Diversity and their staff attorney Jason Totoiu for collaborating with FOB on these comments.
In early August, we got a call from one of our members who was concerned about proposed commercial logging in Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge. That was the first we heard about the proposal, which had a two-week (!) comment period. Thank goodness we got notice in time to take action – thanks to the FOB supporters who keep us on the job!

The Refuge is a special place, home to the largest high elevation wetland in the region, and numerous rare plants. Cheat mountain salamanders, West Virginia northern flying squirrels, and Indiana bats can all be found on the Refuge, which was established in 1994 to protect and restore this unique ecology. The headwaters of the Blackwater River are also in Canaan Valley, making it an important area for water quality. “The presence of 54 species of plants considered to be rare and of conservation concern in West Virginia plus 22 watchlist species has been confirmed in the Valley.” (Rare Plants of Canaan Valley, Southeast Naturalist 2015, Bartgis, Byers et al, 2015)

The area of the Refuge was originally covered with dense spruce/conifer forests, and rhododendron thickets so impenetrable that they nearly prevented early settlers from crossing the Valley. Logging in the late 1800s and subsequent wildfires caused environmental devastation, the effects of which are still visible today. The area could have been flooded by a proposed hydroelectric dam in the 1970s, but that project was eventually defeated and the Valley was preserved.

Given the unique ecology and dramatic history of the area, we were surprised at the speed with which the commercial logging proposal seemed to be moving forward. At the time of the public meeting, Refuge staff seemed to think that timbering could begin as early as this winter, but in a more recent conversation they amended that to say that it would take significantly longer to get started. Commercial logging is proposed for 30 to 40 acres a year, with 10% of the Refuge (roughly 1600 acres) eligible for commercial logging. A similar portion of the Refuge will be eligible for non-commercial thinning.

The first proposed cut would involve a temporary closure of Middle Valley trail and restricted use of A-Frame Road, but many of the details of future timber sales have yet to be finalized. An early estimate projected that administering the commercial timbering program will cost the Refuge $12,000 a year beyond the costs offset by timber receipts.

After requests from Friends of Blackwater and members of the public, the Refuge extended the comment period to a full month. In that time, an impressive 300 comments were submitted. Thank you to everyone who submitted comments! We would also like to thank the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and West Virginia Sierra Club, who co-signed comments drafted by Friends of Blackwater, and Defenders of Wildlife, who submitted their own comments.

Refuge staff are taking the comments submitted seriously, and are expected to release their response to comments later this month. If you want to stay up to date with this ongoing story, follow us on facebook, visit our website at https://saveblackwater.org or email kate@saveblackwater to get added to our email list.
Here are a few of the concerns that have been raised about the Refuge commercial timbering proposal:

**Planning Process:** The Refuge’s Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is the top-level plan that guides management on the Refuge, and it was approved after an analysis and public comment process. However, the CCP doesn’t say that commercial timbering could be done, and it states that only 10 to 15 acres would be cut for early successional habitat each year. The current proposal is 30 to 40 acres a year, more than twice as much timbering as originally proposed. The CCP also suggested that timbering would be done by hand-carrying in chainsaws, rather than using heavy equipment, but it is not stated in the new plan if this would be a condition for commercial timbering.

**Focal Species:** Everyone knows that the Refuge is home to many rare and unique species. Indiana and Northern Long-Eared bats have been documented on the Refuge, and could potentially be present in some of the areas eligible for logging. We would like to know what kind of bat surveys have been conducted in the areas where logging is proposed. The West Virginia northern flying squirrel is another sensitive species, found on several areas in the Refuge including Cabin Mountain and Snowy Point, and presumed to be present throughout the higher elevations of the Kelly-Elkins Tract. Since some of the areas eligible for logging are in between proven flying squirrel habitat, we would also like to know whether any research has been conducted to prove or disprove the possibility that some of the tracts eligible for timbering might be wildlife corridors.

**Invasive Species:** Truck traffic and environmental disturbance are often associated with an increase in invasive species. Given the unique and delicate flora of the Refuge and the difficulty of eradicating invasive species once they arrive, this amounts to a significant risk.

**Erosion:** The first proposed timber harvest would use A-Frame Road and Middle Valley Trail for access and transportation. This will result in a temporary loss of public access, but could also create more long-lasting changes to the quality of the road and trail. The Refuge’s documents note that some of the soils found in CVNWR are particularly vulnerable to erosion, which is the justification used for not allowing most visitors to leave the established trails. If the impact of hikers or fishermen walking off trail is considered too much of a risk to soils, how is timbering acceptable?

**Wilderness:** At the time the CCP was written, a wilderness review was conducted which concluded that there were two sections of the Refuge that had potential to become wilderness areas. The conclusion of this initial wilderness review was that further study was needed on the two potential wilderness areas, identified as WIA7 and WIA10. That further study was supposed to be completed within 3 years of the CCP being finished. We do not know whether or not that further study took place, or what it concluded. Based on the maps we have, the proposed timbering may fall within the potential study areas, which would mean that the study should be completed before any timbering takes place.
October 2018 Lecture Illuminates Tucker County’s Immigrant History

On July 1st, over 70 people packed Cottrill’s Opera House to learn about the history of immigration in Tucker County. The lecture, sponsored by Friends of Blackwater, was by Professor Hal Gorby of West Virginia University, who has been studying oral history recordings from north-central West Virginia, including first-hand accounts of the boom days of immigration in the region.

The lecture covered large-scale issues like the dangers of early coal mining, the difficulty of union organizing in a multi-lingual immigrant community, and the way that an influx of Catholic immigrants reshaped religious life in Tucker County. However, Professor Gorby also pointed out stories of individual immigrants, and highlighted original documents like certificates of citizenship, union letters, and letters from important figures of the era.

The historic space of the Opera House added to the lecture, and when Gorby discussed immigrant-owned small businesses, examples like the former DePollo’s General Store (now the Purple Fiddle) were right down the street. Many people in the crowd had stories about their own ancestors’ immigrant experiences, and the conversation continued after the lecture finished.

October 2018

Fun at Run For It and other Mountain Festivals

On September 29th, a historical presentation sponsored by Friends of Blackwater. Doug Wood interpreted early West Virginia history for the audience, portraying Gabriel Arthur, who was the first white explorer to reach the Kanawha River Valley.

When Gabriel Arthur set out on his exploratory expedition in 1674, West Virginia was still a wild frontier with few white settlers. It was far from empty however, and Arthur’s visit to the Kanawha River Valley was possible because of guidance from local tribal peoples. The presentation took place in the afternoon, and ran late because so many people had questions about the presentation.

On August 4, 2018, we unveiled a new historic roadside marker sign in the town of Hendricks to celebrate the Blackwater Canyon Rail Grade. The marker explains the history of the Blackwater Canyon railroad route, once an important route for the timber and coal industries, as well as a major connection between the mountain and valley towns.

The steepness of the grade made this section of the railroad a “wonder of engineering” when it was first built. Today the grade is a recreational trail used by residents and tourists for hiking and biking.

All of the speakers emphasized the importance of remembering the past, and expressed a hope that the sign, and other projects like it, would encourage people to visit Hendricks. Although there haven’t been a train running down the Hendricks and Thomas since the 1980s, Hinkle noted that the rail grade still has potential to connect the towns.

The Tucker County Landmarks Commission also contributed to the marker project, which is an official West Virginia Highway Historical Marker. After the marker was unveiled, everyone went to the Hendricks Town Hall for refreshments.

The following is the text of the historic marker:

**Blackwater Canyon Rail Grade**

In 1888, Henry Gassaway Davis began a railroad expansion from Thomas to Hendricks. The Black Fork grade is a prime example of a 19th-century railway engineering, with grades reaching 3.75% to drop 1,236 feet in 10 miles of mountainous terrain. Bought by Western Maryland Railway in 1905, the line was abandoned by its successor, CSX, in 1983. It now is a recreational rail-trail.

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On August 1st, 75 people gathered at Cottrill’s Opera House to learn about Henry Gassaway Davis, the businessman who named many of the towns in this area. Friends of Blackwater sponsored the event, which featured noted historian John Alexander Williams.

Williams is a native of White Sulphur Springs in Greenbrier County, and has written about his home state for more than 50 years. His books include “West Virginia and the Captains of Industry”; “Apalachia, A History”; and “The Danger Which is for Beginners”. He was the script writer for the Public Broadcasting System’s multi-lingual West Virginia Film history project.

His subject, Henry Gassaway Davis, built a railroad, timber and coal empire in Tucker in Tucker County, and the artifacts of that era are part of today’s cultural heritage in the region. The Davis Coal and Coke Company attracted workers to settle here, and created an economic boom that put Tucker County on the map in the late 1800s. However, Henry Gassaway Davis also manipulated the political system to advance his business, and helped ensure that family members like son-in-law Stephen B. Elkins ended up in positions of power. Williams did not shy away from the elements of corruption in this piece of history, and helped to explain the tangled web of back stories, patronage, and political appointments that supported Davis’ empire.

In the late 1890s, the Davis Coal Company expanded in Thomas and Hendricks, and added “steamers” to the railroad to unload goods. In 1900, the Hendricks Coal Company was merged into the Davis Coal Company.

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Earlier that week Williams gave a lecture at West Virginia University in Morgantown, focused on how the natural resource economy has driven politics throughout West Virginia’s history. Both talks were sponsored by Friends of Blackwater, with assistance from the West Virginia Humanities Council.
Nature Walk Celebrates Old Growth Forests

On July 15th, 20 nature lovers met at Blackwater Falls State Park to learn about the characteristics of old growth forest in an event presented by Friends of Blackwater. The event was led by naturalist Doug Wood, who gave practical lessons on how to identify old growth, as well as some information on the ways that these ecosystems benefit wildlife and water quality. Wood mentioned the recent controversy over timbering in state parks, and how that debate had prompted people to learn more about state park forests and start inventorying existing old growth.

After an introductory slideshow that documented old growth forests throughout the state, the group headed out into the park to look for real-world examples and practice measuring trees. West Virginia’s State Parks are a great place to see mature and old growth forest, although in parks that were logged in the past the remnants that survived may be in more remote areas. Wood emphasized that it is important to respect park rules when searching for old growth, and when in doubt, check with the park staff to see which areas you are allowed to access. For the event on the 25th there was no question, since the group was joined by park naturalist Paula Cousins for the outdoor portion of the event.

Otter Creek Volunteer Day a Success

On October 6th, Friends of Blackwater partnered with the Forest Service for a volunteer day in the Otter Creek Wilderness Area. While we didn’t get the massive workforce we were hoping for, we partnered with the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards to work on 1.6 miles of the Shavers Mountain Trail down in the Otter Creek Wilderness area. In total we were able to cut-out about a dozen fallen trees, drain and de-berm a pair of switchbacks and drainage seeps, and re-bench a 30 foot long stretch of degraded trail.

The Shavers Mountain Trail is 10 miles long and rated as strenuous. It runs from Route 33 at the Alpena Gap, into the heart of the Otter Creek wilderness and traverses the ridge of 3740 foot high Shavers Mountain, offering some great views of the Otter Creek valley below. As the leaves fall of the trees, the views and solitude should only get better and better.

Volunteers Spruce Up Historic Blackwater Canyon Site

On September 22, 2018, Friends of Blackwater volunteers partnered with the U.S. Forest Service to improve the historic railroad roundhouse/machine shop foundation located along the Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail near the town of Thomas.

The roundhouse was used to turn trains arriving in Thomas around, and send them back down the Canyon. All that is left today is its massive foundation, which shows today’s visitors the huge scale of industrial operations in the area.

The foundations were overgrown and difficult to see from the new historic signs that Friends of Blackwater had installed in June to interpret the site.

Volunteers Lucy Duff, Moriah Munsch, Angie Lipscomb, Tom Rodd, and Ira Rodd worked to clear vegetation and make the structure visible from the trail (map available on our website). Forest Service archaeologists Gavin Hale and Jesse Morton were on hand to help with the work and provide historic information about the site. Friends of Blackwater director Judy Rodd and staffer Kate Leary also took part in clearing the old train maintenance area.

Film makers David and Melissa Rohm of Wild Excellence are working on a short film about the Blackwater area, and they filmed the beginning of the volunteer event. Thanks to everyone!

Friends of Blackwater Featured at WVNPA Panel

On September 25th and 26th, nonprofits from around the state met at Canaan Valley Resort for the West Virginia Non-Profit Association’s annual leadership summit. There were panels and workshops throughout the gathering, including one featuring Friends of Blackwater.

The “New Approaches to Volunteerism” panel included Kelly Stadelman of the Tucker Community Foundation, Danny Swan of Grow Ohio Valley, Callie Cronin-Sams of the City of Buckhannon, Bill Kuhn of Generation West Virginia, and Judy Rodd of Friends of Blackwater.

For her portion of the presentation, Judy talked about the range of volunteer opportunities available with Friends of Blackwater, the value of partnering with other organizations for volunteer recruitment, and methods of getting the word out about events. In the last few minutes, staffer Kate Leary talked about the new Friends of Blackwater website and digital communications.

The panels were well-attended, and the feedback we received was very positive. Thank you to the West Virginia Non-Profit Association for including us in this great event.
In September, Friends of Blackwater hired Langan, Inc. and Hedin Environmental to design a replacement for the wetland anoxic limestone drain (WALD) mine drainage treatment system, just downstream of the FOB office, on the North Fork of the Blackwater. The WALD was an experimental system that was installed to treat acid mine drainage entering the North Fork back in the ’90s. The original WALD failed within a few years of being built, but our replacement system will deliver more lasting benefits.

Both companies have multiple years of experience in the realm of acid mine drainage treatment, with truly innovative projects in their portfolios. Check out the Pittsburgh Botanic Garden’s website "A Reclamation Story" for an amazing example of one such project.

The basic design of the new North Fork system is two to four drainable limestone beds installed in parallel, plus a pair of settling ponds. Friends of Blackwater initially proposed a series of limestone leach beds, but were convinced that drainable limestone beds offered superior performance and lower long-term costs.

Months of design work lie ahead, and navigating the labyrinth of regulations and permits needed to bring such a project into existence is no easy task. But we, the Monongahela National Forest and our engineering partners are excited about the potential of the project. While it won’t solve all the North Fork’s problems, this treatment system is a promising first step on the road to recovery for the North Fork.

The illustration below demonstrates how water will circulate through the system. Periodically flushing and draining the limestone bed will prevent the limestone from becoming plated with minerals.

Progress on a Beaver Creek Watershed-Based Plan

After 18 months of monitoring and a series of meetings with state, business and nonprofit partners, we are closing in on a first draft of the Beaver Creek watershed-based plan. In order to receive grants from the EPA targeting restoration of the waterway, we have to have a watershed based plan, so this is the first step for any potential future restoration work.

Along the way we have discovered some interesting things. For example, some of the small and heavily forested tributaries of Beaver Creek are highly acidic, despite the general lack of acidifying chemicals in the water. Apparently this is in part due to the Pottsville sandstone geology - common to the southern headwaters and upper tributaries areas of Beaver Creek (between A-Frame Road and Mt. Storm Power Plant) - having very low buffering capacity, thus providing minimal natural protection against acid rain.

We are excited to see the impact of the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources’ liming efforts on Beaver Creek. They have been periodically dumping tons of limestone sands into acid mine drainage seeps and tributary streams to try and raise the pH in the Beaver Creek main stem. Data show that their efforts are proving successful and keeping the pH above 6. There are many aquatic species that won’t tolerate a pH below 6.

Limestone sands have their limitations. A constant resupply is needed as the sands get washed away by the stream, and the liming does not address metal precipitates. Improving the pH is important, but Beaver Creek also has temperature issues which will eventually need to be addressed. That said, DNR’s work shows that it won’t take an overwhelming and unrealistic push to bring Beaver Creek back to a more functioning ecosystem. That’s good news!

Top Right: Volunteer Tim Home monitors water quality in Beaver Creek.
Bottom Right: Dumping limestone sands into a tributary.
Way back in 2003, two “Blackwater Heroes,” Attorney Kitty Dooley and Supreme Court Justice Larry Starcher, partnered with FOB Board member Tom Rodd to launch the J.R. Clifford Project. The goal was to celebrate and publicize the story of John Robert Clifford (1848-1933), West Virginia’s first African American attorney.

In the 1890s, Clifford represented the Tucker County schoolteacher Carrie Willams, who taught in the “Colored School” in the Town of Coketon at the head of the Blackwater Canyon, which is where the Friends of Blackwater office is located today. Clifford won a landmark court case that protected the school terms and teacher pay for African American students in post-Civil War West Virginia.

Over the years, Dooley and Starcher and Rodd have criscrossed West Virginia, doing dozens of programs that tell the Clifford/Williams story and celebrating them as “Blackwater heroes.” They are all volunteers, and their service to the cause of racial justice is something to be proud of.

They have helped Friends of Blackwater create many great publications about Clifford (and we have a lot of our coloring books for folks who are interested!) – as well as several cool historical markers.

This year Friends of Blackwater celebrated the Clifford Project at Kitty Dooley’s 60th birthday party and at a “roast” for Larry Starcher. We love Larry and Kitty, and we thank them for their selfless dedication to the cause of human betterment and justice!
Celebrate the Holidays with Friends of Blackwater

Holiday Order Form

Name: ___________________________________________________________
Address: ___________________________________________________________________________
City/State/Zip: _______________________________________________________________________
Phone: _______________________________________________________________________________
Email: _______________________________________________________________________________

Write the quantity on the line next to the item. For t-shirts, also indicate a size.

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*All shirts are available in size S through XXL

Mail to PO Box 247, Thomas WV 26292
Or order on-line at https://saveblackwater.org/shop/
October 2018

CONTENTS

DOUGLAS, WEST VIRGINIA, A HISTORY 2
MORGANTOWN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE 3
COMMERCIAL TIMBERING CONTROVERSY IN CANAAN VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE 4-5
FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER EVENTS 6, 7 & 8
NORTH FORK AND BEAVER CREEK RESTORATION 9
NEW BOOK FROM KENT MASON & JR CLIFFORD VOLUNTEERS 10
HOLIDAY ORDER FORM 11
NEW BUSINESS IN TUCKER COUNTY 12

New Business in Tucker County

Looking for a ride in Tucker County? Digger Adventures is a new shuttle service that provides tours, transportation for special events, and more. Based in Parsons, the business is operated by the husband and wife team of Mark and Stephanie Burns, making it locally owned and operated. They offer a Tucker County history tour put together in cooperation with the Tucker County Landmark Commission. Participants visit historic locations in Thomas, Davis, Parsons, and Saint George over the course of three hours. We were happy to see that the Davis Coal and Coke Company engineering building, located right across from our office, made the list of history tour stops. Learn more at https://diggeradventures.com