

Point Pleasant: Land of History and Mystery

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Legend has it that during his surveying days just prior to the Revolutionary War, George Washington referred to the area where the Ohio and Kanawha rivers meet as a “pleasant point.” A few years later, the town officially became known as Point Pleasant.

But despite the town's quaint and idyllic setting, its history has been anything but pleasant. It is clouded with bloodshed and horrifying legends that range from a dying chief's curse to a mysterious creature roaming the landscape.



The Battle of Point Pleasant

On October 10, 1774, it was said to be a foggy and cool morning as a force of about 1,000 men led by Colonel Andrew Lewis camped along the banks of the two rivers as they awaited another group coming from Pittsburgh that would unite to squash raids from American Indian tribes. But Shawnee Chief Cornstalk had other plans, opting to attack the smaller force around Point Pleasant before the two militias could connect.

The battle raged on for hours, and it was said that the rivers ran red that day before Cornstalk eventually retreated his forces back across the Ohio River. Cornstalk eventually agreed to a peace treaty, preventing the native tribes from becoming allies to the British army.

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Cornstalk's Curse

With the Revolutionary War in full force, Cornstalk desperately tried to maintain peace on the frontier as the British were sending supplies and weapons to tribes as an encouragement for them to launch raids on the frontier. Cornstalk traveled to Fort Randolph in 1777 to warn of an impending assault. Two of the fort's men came upon a Mingo war party while hunting, and one was killed. Dozens of soldiers descended upon the fort, seeking revenge and demanding that Cornstalk and his son be turned over to them. Cornstalk, his son and two other American Indians at the fort were murdered. Legend has it that while he lay dying, Cornstalk asked the Great Spirit to curse the land. Several tragic events in the town have been blamed on the curse.

Mad Ann Bailey

The Battle of Point Pleasant also proved to be a defining moment in the life of Ann Hennis Trotter Bailey. Her husband, Richard Trotter, was killed in the battle, which prompted her to join the militia as a scout. Ann rode through the frontier, recruiting soldiers and delivering messages to various outposts. In 1788, she married John Bailey, and the couple lived at Fort Lee, near Charleston. The fort came under attack in 1791, and Ann became a legend for her 100-mile ride to Fort Savannah in Lewisburg to obtain ammunition, which is credited with saving Fort Lee.

Mothman

In November 1966, two couples reported being chased by a strange, bird-like creature with glowing red eyes while they were driving through an area north of Point Pleasant that had been home to a munitions factory during World War II. More sightings followed over the next year.



The Silver Bridge Disaster

Built in 1928 and named for the metallic paint used to coat its steel beams, the Silver Bridge spanned the Ohio River, connecting Point Pleasant to Gallipolis, Ohio. But on December 15, 1967, the structure became the site of the worst bridge disaster in American history. Cars filled with holiday shoppers and over-the-road trucks crammed onto the bridge, and in less than a minute, 64 people were dumped into the icy waters below as the bridge's deck began twisting and crumbling. Forty-six of those people perished. Investigators determined that a small stress fracture inside of a load-bearing steel beam caused the bridge to fail.

Point Pleasant Today

Visitors descend on Point Pleasant today by the thousands each September to celebrate the Mothman Festival. The town hosts a Battle Days celebration each October. Those looking to learn of the town's history can enjoy a walk along the Ohio River to view large murals decorating the floodwalls in the downtown area.

Resources

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