

The discovery of the Blue Creek Oil Field in 1911 changed the community. It altered the landscape, bolstered the railroad, and grew the town.

The Ohio Fuel Oil Company first tapped the large oil reserve when it drilled the Schwartz and Barth #1 well. This was soon followed by over 1,000 wells throughout the area, spanning 10-20 square miles on both sides of the Elk River.

While the oil boom lasted for several years, reserves began to drop between 1913 and 1916; new oil wells drilled during this time produced smaller amounts of oil and gas.



The Blue Creek Twin Arch Bridge over Blue Creek, showing the northwest, facing northeast.
Credit: Michael Baker International

BLUE CREEK BRIDGE

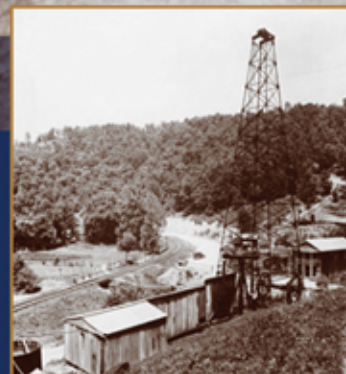
The Blue Creek Twin Arch Bridge over Blue Creek was built in 1926, at a time when more people had cars, and roads began to improve. Before 1926, there was no bridge here, so travelers sometimes drove their cars over the nearby Charleston, Clendenin & Sutton Railroad bridge to cross the creek! The bridge was constructed by the Luten Bridge Company of York, Pennsylvania. Daniel B. Luten (1869-1946) was a bridge engineer who patented improved bridge designs to make them more efficient to build. Through a network of licensed agents and branch offices, Luten promoted concrete as an alternative to steel, which made the bridges lighter. The bridge over Blue Creek had two concrete arches, which supported the upper deck. The bridge was demolished in 2018.

BLUE CREEK OIL BOOM! 1911-1916



Image showing Blue Creek Community, at the juncture of Blue Creek and the Elk River. Note the railroad rights-of-way also serving as a route for pedestrians and automobiles and worker housing along the railroad.
Credit: Kanawha County Images: A Bicentennial History 1788-1988 by Stan B. Cohen, 1987

View looking south across Elk River toward Blue Creek, ca. 1912.
Photo by A.T. Colebank, Sutton, WV. Credit: Collection of Bill Hoover



The Skinner well east of Blue Creek, along the K&WV railroad tracks.
Credit: Mike Thomas Collection, WVNC Rails Website

RAILROAD

Two railroads passed through Blue Creek: The Charleston, Clendenin, & Sutton Railroad (built ca. 1890-1897), and the Kanawha & West Virginia Railroad (built 1903-1905).

Both lines initially provided access to the interior of the state, where there were no reliable roadways. Trains carried products such as coal, salt, and timber from the Kanawha and Elk river valleys to market. During the oil boom, derricks sprang up along the sides of the railroad tracks. Trains were essential for shipping supplies and products.

The railroads were also used for passenger traffic. The Kanawha & West Virginia Railroad (and its successor, the New York Central) even ran a school train called the "Beeliner" through the 1960s!

Train passing through Blue Creek, early 20th century.
Credit: Courtesy of mywvhome.com



Detail of Copenhaver Store, built 1913.
Credit: Michael Baker International



COMMUNITY

The rapid development of gas and oil wells in the Blue Creek area created a boom in the town and a rise of other related industries. By 1914, Blue Creek had a population of 100, three stores, one school, and one church. Many gas and oil companies even formed baseball teams.



The Blue Creek baseball team, early 20th century.
Credit: Kanawha County Images: A Bicentennial History 1788-1988 by Stan B. Cohen, 1987

John H. Copenhaver operated a large stock farm along Blue Creek. He also ran the local mercantile business, which served oil field workers. He later leased out portions of his land to gas companies for wells. Worker housing lined both sides of the railroad tracks to the south and east of the Copenhaver Farm and Store (see image at top right).



The Copenhaver House, ca. 1899-1900 (top), and a collection of farm outbuildings (above) including a springhouse/smokehouse, chicken house, icehouse/blacksmith shop, and granary.
Credit: Michael Baker International

