



U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

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RAHALL'S BRAMWELL HISTORICAL PARK BILL GAINS MOMENTUM
West Virginians Testify In Support of Measure During Hearing

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A measure sponsored by U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) to establish a National Historical Park at Bramwell in southwestern Mercer County received a major boost today during a hearing by the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands.

Testifying on behalf of the legislation were the Mayor of Bramwell, Harry Donnal Murphy; the Chairman of the Bramwell Historic Landmark District, Louise Stoker; the Curator of History for the Huntington Museum of Art, Beth Hager; and, Bill Drennen, the Commissioner of the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.

"We have been fortunate to find in Bramwell some outstanding, and what I believe to be nationally significant historical, cultural and architectural values that are not adequately represented in the National Park System," Rahall, a ranking member of the Subcommittee, observed during the hearing. "Moreover, in Bramwell are an extremely enthusiastic group of people who are fully supportive of this legislation."

Rahall's bill, H.R.4978, the "Bramwell National Historical Park Act of 1990" would establish the area as a unit of the National Park System giving it the same status as Harpers Ferry, located in the State's eastern Panhandle.

"A National Historical Park for Bramwell would seem to be the next logical step in the process of the preservation of this unique environment and of presenting this environment to the American people," Bill Drennan stated. "We in West Virginia have long known and been proud of Bramwell, often referring to it as West Virginia history's best kept secret. But we also feel that it has been a secret kept for too long from the rest of the nation," he added.

Louise Stoker told the Subcommittee: "We have lost and are losing company houses, company stores, superintendents' houses, bookkeepers' houses, coal tipples, hand-loading tools, store managers' houses, owners' mansions, coal camps as they were, and most important of all, the stories of those coal mining pioneers." Bramwell, Stoker said, "fills the need for an interpretive center of America's Coal Mining Heritage."

According to Mayor Murphy: "It is probably fitting that our community be once again in the forefront of the development of our area. It was the cultural and financial center of the billion dollar coalfields. Its influence was of an international character and very definitely influential in the development of America in the turn of the century."

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Beth Hager noted: "Bramwell, known at one time as the 'Coalfield Capital,' has great potential as a cultural tourism center which can serve to educate visitors to the region about the rich social and industrial heritage of the Pocahontas Coalfield. Bramwell's unique character and central role in the early historical development of the West Virginia coal industry make it worthy of serious consideration as a National Historical Park."

On behalf of the Interior Department, Regional Director James Coleman testified in opposition to the legislation on the basis that the National Park Service did not currently possess sufficient information on the area. Taking the Park Service to task, Rahall said that early on he had sought to get its historic staff interested in doing a study on Bramwell. "I found that they were wrapped up in their own personal priorities and would rather do national landmark theme studies on topics such as sports, than mining or labor history," Rahall told Coleman.

"I believe that what has been developed already in support of the existing National Register listing, and what is currently being put together as part of the application for an expanded historic district, is sufficient. I say this especially in light of the failure of the National Park Service's historic staff to recognize the significance of an entire and extremely important era in this Nation's history -- the rise of organized labor from the ashes of the company town," he added.

During the hearing, Coleman conceded that the National Park System currently does not include a historical park that incorporates the types of values found at Bramwell.

"Bramwell is an excellent example of the Age of the Coal Baron. In Bramwell there exists some extremely well-preserved turn-of-the-century coal baron era mansions. However, with the outlying coal camps such as at Coopers, complete with company store and company built housing for the workers, both sides of the story--management and labor--are represented," concluded Rahall.