

Preserving Yesterday Enriches Tomorrow



Madison County
Historical Society

www.madisonvahistoricalociety.org

November 2019

A Doctor's Experience Before and During World War I



Our speaker for the November 17th, 2019, Madison County Historical Society quarterly meeting will be Mr. John Lynch. Mr. Lynch is a retired Federal civil servant with 3 decades of service to our nation. He is a member of the Sons of the American Revolution and the Society of Colonial Wars. An avid historian, he has published articles on the history of military medicine and has spoken about Revolutionary War battles in Virginia.

Most interesting is that Mr. Lynch has early ties to Madison County and that will be the subject of his talk to the Society: "Madison County Connections: A Medical Officer in the American Expeditionary Force, 1918-1919."



Dr. Junius Lynch married Lucy Virginia Kemper at the bride's father's house on 9 December, 1891. Dr. Lynch was an 1888 graduate of the Medical College of Virginia and was making a name for himself through his work with the railroads and his efforts treating yellow fever patients during a yellow fever epidemic in Tennessee. Miss Kemper was a daughter of James Lawson Kemper and Belle Cave and was born in her father's house in Madison in January 1867. Dr. Lynch enlisted in the Virginia Volunteers at an early age, formally became its Surgeon General in 1910, and remained Surgeon General when the Virginia Volunteers became the Virginia National Guard in 1916. Dr. Lynch volunteered to go to France in August 1917, was Federalized and spent 18 months with the AEF. He served with the 93rd and 42nd Divisions and became the hospital commander for the largest United States Army Air Service installation in France, later becoming Chief of Surgery at Base Hospital #57, Paris.

Upon return to the United States in July 1919, Dr. Lynch became involved in the American Legion, achieved senior leadership positions in Virginia and later became a member of the American Legion's National Committee where he worked to help recognize WWI veterans.

This should be a very interesting program and focuses on a WWI veteran at a very appropriate time just a week after celebrating Armistice Day, marking the end of WWI (now Veterans Day celebrating all Veterans).

The meeting will be held in the Madison County Administrative Offices auditorium at 2:00pm Sunday November 17th. Everyone is invited to attend and refreshments will be served following the meeting.

THE "FIRE KING" DEVASTATED THE TOWN OF MADISON 100 YEARS AGO

The little town of Madison, Virginia, was winding up the second decade of the 20th century in December, 1919, 100 years ago. It was 4:30 a.m. on Friday, Dec. 26, and the community could be said to be sleeping off the effects of the Christmas holiday. But not everyone. There were two federal prisoners in the downtown jail, Perry Sisk and Luther Nicholson, who were more alert than most – and they noticed somewhat abruptly that the Main Street post office across from them was on fire.

Sisk and Nicholson conferred briefly on the chances of freeing themselves while the disaster was going on, but then settled on what seemed to be the most reasonable course. According to the community's weekly newspaper, the Exponent, they went to their vertically-barred window and, certainly not unreasonably, yelled "Fire!"



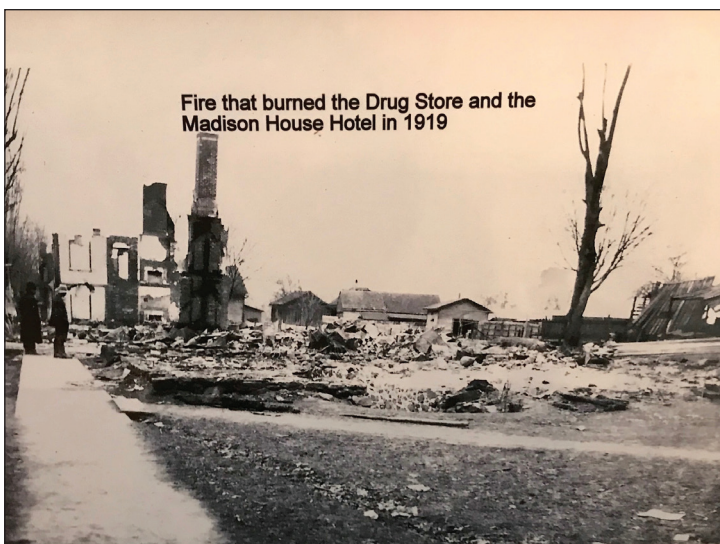
Before the Fire: looking north toward the Arcade

By then, the Exponent reported, a blaze about the size of a man's body was coming from the post office roof. Madison had no fire department then, most of the downtown buildings were frame, and this was serious business. There wasn't even a municipal water supply, although the courthouse had a well, as did most residents. According to the newspaper story, printed several weeks later and after some painstaking reportorial work, the town rose as one man (and woman) and went out to save itself.

Mrs. Lizzie Taylor, who lived nearby, was among the first to see the fire. She woke up her sons-in-law, visiting for the holiday, and dispatched them to the street. She then went to the phone and began a series of early morning wakeup calls.

"Soon the town was awake," according to the Jan. 9, 1920 paper, and "many only partly clad were hastening to the scene carrying one or two buckets." There began a long and dangerous battle with the flames, with people fighting as hard as they could as a series of buildings burned to the ground, or almost. In all, five buildings were destroyed, and several others heavily damaged.

The post office was consumed along with a storage building behind it, as the blaze began to take over the Madison House hotel on the north side. Offices in the hotel building, including those of a dentist and a barber, were quickly devastated. The drug store on the other side of the post office was incinerated, and a bank and a store were next in line. But nobody gave up.



"No one lost his or her head in the situation. Lines were formed from the wells to the buildings and everyone kept his place," the newspaper related, with no one getting exciting and dashing about. "While several men took charge by mutual consent, the majority did what each worker seemed to know was expected of him and would help most."

The prisoners, Sisk and Nicholson, had been released almost immediately by Irwin White, and they stayed and joined the effort, so enthusiastically

that witnesses said “no men ever fought fire better than they did.” Heroes at the Krider home were two black men, R.I. Crigler and George Young, who were said to have “stuck no matter how fierce the heat.” Indeed, the account said, “No praise can be too high for the colored men, who worked hard and often in dangerous positions.”

Country people came too, either in response to the early phone calls or because they saw the fire. The only hope was water, kept supplied by the bucket brigade, sometimes mixed with salt. Saturated blankets were used to smother the fire; the large amounts of water came bucket by bucket from several wells, including those at the courthouse



Post Office before the Fire

and at the Thrift property. The well behind the hotel was too close to use until things had quieted down.

A lawyer carried out his law books, a resident dragged a new mattress outside, store records were lugged out of the path of destruction. The firefighters were driven away from the store and bank building by the roaring heat, particularly when the wind shifted, but as soon as the shift reversed itself they would be back. Oddly, no one was hurt, although a man named Allie Taylor ignored warnings to leave at one point and his clothing caught fire. The remedy was a bucket of water tossed over him.

The fire never managed to spread across Main Street to the west side. One reason may be a large brick building that in 2019 was being remodeled yet again. Madison native Everett Weakley, now 90 years old, says the building housed a bank as well as the post office over the years. He worked for the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, and when it took over the building they also remodeled. According to Weakley, the building is three bricks thick, and it had a tin roof. He said he had looked into the attic when the ASCS was there, and some of the rafters were charred from the heat

they had endured in 1919. The tin no doubt kept the roof from bursting into flames, but the charring was so bad that the rafters had to be reinforced.

So, no crossing the street for what the Exponent referred to in the opening paragraph of its story as the “Fire King.” It was halted at the south end of the blaze’s pathway, leaving a store run by W.G. Blankenbaker partly burned to an “unroofed shell.” On the other end of the ravaged area, the historical brick Arcade building put an end to the fire’s travels.

The Arcade was then part of the Madison House hotel, and it was the only brick structure in the lineup. According to a story in the Charlottesville Daily Progress, it “stubbornly remained intact” as devastation went on to the rest of the hotel. Many of those water-soaked blankets (there must have been a blanket shortage in the town that January) were used to help its resistance, and while the interior went the walls did not. The role of the building in “saving the town” was cited in an effort some years ago by a Save the Arcade coalition of citizens working to preserve it. When the Board of Supervisors acted to do so, it was pointed out that the structure may be the oldest in the county. The first known mention was in a 1794 deed to an adjoining property.

Losses to the runaway blaze were toted up during the following weeks, with much attention by the newspaper account to what was insured and what was not. Nothing was saved from the drug store, which was insured for \$1,000, with an added \$2,000 for the stock. Still, in spite of this foresight, it was thought the actual financial damage might be double that. The Madison house property was not covered; its insurance had lapsed in October. Dr. Collins’ dental office was destroyed, and he had no insurance either.

Impressively, the post office was opened the morning of the fire in the courthouse. Postmaster



Taylor noted that the "government is a considerable loser," with \$205 in currency burned, along with some registered mail and Christmas presents – plus \$40 in stamps. But new supplies were brought in quickly. Unhappily, the post office had also contained the movie to be shown in the Main Street theater that Saturday – so no night on the town the weekend after Christmas for movie-goers.

Several residents had heavy losses, including some currency and war savings certificates. Louie Alexander had a well-equipped barber shop. In fact, the paper described it as "one that would have been a credit to a larger town." He had no insurance, but by the time the newspaper was published, he was back in business nearby.

Where the fire was halted going south, the escape was not complete. The Blankenbaker store building, then owned by the Thrifts, was covered by insurance. Damages were put at \$500, but there was also an estimated \$2,500 worth of stock lost. The newspaper noted that Blankenbaker had carried out his books and money on hand to a "place of safety: also his cat." The bank building, next in line, escaped but had quite a bit of damage, notably to the heavy front door.

Fire companies from Culpeper and Orange arrived after the flames were put out via bucket brigade and the proverbial wet blanket. It was after all December, and roads were rough going from those distances; again, the isolation of Madison a century ago was considerable. But the little town was convinced it could take care of itself, and it did.



Hotel chair that survived by being thrown into the Street. Today it lives in the Arcade

Sidebar: Musings from Kathleen

It isn't easy to conceptualize 100 years ago, or to put something like the 1919 Madison fire in perspective. It might help to consider what the community newspaper, the *Exponent*, printed along with its coverage of the historic event.

The masthead, a list of details about the publication, notes that the issue that the fire story appeared in was printed for Friday, Jan. 9, 1920. The preceding issue in the bound volume in the offices of the current paper, the *Madison Eagle*, was dated Dec. 5, 1919, so that was a month between papers; partly, of course, due to the holiday. The mast also notes that the publisher was B.M. Bushong, a local man who didn't own a media empire.

Another reason for the delay was hinted at – the end of the article notes that "The foregoing account of the fire was prepared with a view of publishing a paper last week but circumstances over which we had no control prevented the issue." During the elapsed time since the late December fire, people were left on their own to tell their neighbors where they were when the blaze started, or how much they lost if they had a Main Street establishment.

It was a different time in many ways. Across from the story is an ad proclaiming that "There's Big Money in Muskrat Trapping" if you wanted to send the furs to A.B. Shubert Inc. on West Austin Avenue in Chicago. Another ad offers Prince Albert Tobacco, actually in a can.

Just under the information box about the publication a line notes "President Wilson was 63 years old Dec. 27." Another small item following the fire story calmly notes that prohibition will go into effect a week later, on Jan. 16. What is unexpected in that time of limited travel was that as usual, business reigned. "The large whiskey distilleries are shipping their stock out of the country with train loads going to seaports."

The *Eagle* itself began in 1924, according to the Oct. 7, 1999 centennial issue of the paper and/or its progenitors. It succeeded the *Exponent*, printed from 1910 to 1923, although there had already been papers. At the time of its official creation, the publisher and staff explained that the whole name was the *Madison County Eagle*, and one aim was to emphasize the county part. They also wanted a shorter name than "exponent," plus there was also a weekly Culpeper *Exponent*.

*Note: Many thanks go to Kathleen Hoffman who researched and wrote the Fire article. Born in Charlottesville and educated at Mary Washington College, Kathleen currently lives in Madison County, with husband Jack and pooch Hobbes, and keeps several local organizations on the straight and narrow. Professionally, she spent many years as a reporter for the Culpeper **Star-Exponent**. She recently published a book about her experiences titled **Daily News, Little Papers are Journalism Too**. Copies of her book are available for sale in our Museum Gift Shop.*

It's Time to Shop!

The falling leaves remind us that the Thanksgiving and Gift Giving seasons are fast approaching! We invite everyone to visit our Museum Gift Shop to purchase gifts for folks on your holiday lists, or just treat yourself! New this fall are notecards with a uniquely Madison flavor. Some feature watercolors painted by local artist Frances Lacy; others show photographs by Society member Pat Mingee that highlight the County's scenic vistas, flowers, churches, and other buildings. We also continue to offer gift jars of the famous "Kemper Tea" and gold Christmas ornaments, in seven designs: Courthouse, Arcade, Kemper Residence, Village of Rochelle, and Piedmont, Hebron, and Chestnut Grove Churches.

The Shop stocks more than twenty books covering the formation of SNP, stories of families who lived on the mountain, and other topics of interest to people here in the County. Shopping in the Gift Shop is a good Society at the same time. Within the month, we hope to have *Memories, a Pictorial History of the Early Years*. This book covers the early history of Madison, Orange, and Fauquier Counties.

Finally, if you or anyone you know owns a copy of the Scheel Map of Madison county, you need an index, available at the gift shop in CD and print formats. The maps themselves can be obtained at the Madison Library; however, we sell another Scheel map that shows the local area in 1776.

The Gift Shop is open during regular Museum hours: 10:00–2:00 on Tuesdays, Thursday, and Fridays. The Museum will be closed for its Winter Break starting on Wednesday, December 18th.



Society Website

For the last several months, the Society's website has been undergoing review and updating. We are pleased to announce that the new site is now up and running. The address is the same: <http://www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org/>. Please check out the new look! We particularly encourage those of you who get print copies of our newsletters to go to the site. Click "Newsletter" and then click the issue (year, followed by month) you wish to review. You will see recent issues in full color, and you can enlarge the photographs to see all the detail they contain. Thanks to Beppy White for coordinating this website project.

COLONIAL DAYS

Colonial Days will be held at Waverly Yowell School on Nov. 26, 2019. We will have about 6 vendors as usual. The most interesting thing about this year is that the 4th graders will be touring the museum prior to the actual day of the celebration. There will be 6 classes of about 25 students each that will be involved with the tour and the demonstrations. It is wonderful to have the students come to the museum and see what their ancestors had to deal with during the time that they grew up. They will be able to tour the Mansion as well as the Servants Quarters and Law Office. There are displays about the school that Mrs. Hoover built for the mountain children and about African American roles in the development of Madison County. More about the actual Day in the next newsletter.

Steve Hoffman On Madison County Commerce



The speaker for the August 18th Madison County Historical Society quarterly meeting was Mr. Steve Hoffman, a well-known Madison County native and someone who has made other presentations to the Historical Society, including an excellent presentation on “stills” in February of 2017.

The topic of the August presentation was “Old Madison Stores”. He began with some background information about settlers in the county. The first settlers arrived in the early 1700’s from the Palatinate, then the Scots-Irish and then the English.

1714-1830 was Madison County’s “Colonial Period.” The early Germans brought their own tools, seeds, etc., and Madison County was the frontier for the country for a period of time. To trade, goods were sent to Spotswood Plantation and then shipped to the coast and to England and other places. An early road was the Fishback Rolling Road coming from the Oak Park area and passing by the Fishback Wagon Shop built in 1804. After the Civil War all trade shifted to Gordonsville or Culpeper. Exports were mainly tobacco and lumber. Everyone farmed even if they had another occupation. Here Steve shared numerous documents with

names of residents and their occupations.

Prior to 1929 there were 76 small stores in Madison County. People came down from the mountains to shop as did the local populace and most people did not wish to travel great distances to shop. Grain and corn mills brought people to the area but no grain/corn meal was shipped as it was all used locally. Here Steve showed ledgers from various stores showing transactions and explaining that there was lots of bartering among folks with well-known Madison County names: Clore, Crigler, Yowell, Aylor, Hoffman, etc. Steve has found ledgers in various places, buying and collecting them. He also showed framed ads for stores.

There were many furniture stores and makers in the county, not just Clore and Hoffman. Steve showed catalogs and ads and framed calendars advertising stores. Madison County had its own money which was printed in the basement of the Eagle House. Stores offered tokens of various denominations (5 and ten cents, etc., and a few dollars) which were used to give change as hard money was rare. These tokens could be taken back as payment. Stores accepted each other’s tokens and then exchanged them.

Existing country stores are Syria, Wolftown and Etlan (not really an old store).

In 1830 migration began from Madison to the west. There were 330 families in the county then. After WWI, migration began into the county and country stores became important centers to meet, greet and shop, etc.

In summary Mr. Hoffman brought a treasure trove of rare ledgers, ads, calendars and catalogs from small mom and pop stores existing in Madison County from the early 1700s to the 1960s and 70s. Each had a story which he shared and there was much interest from audience members, many of whom are descendants of Madison County’s early settlers.



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Return Service Requested



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The Madison County Historical Society is a non-profit organization founded and operated for the perpetuation and preservation of Madison County heritage and traditions. The mission of the Society is to record, preserve, and stimulate interest in the history of Madison County, its families, occupations, and way of life.

Memberships and donations, major sources of income for the Society, are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. Membership application forms are available at the Museum and on-line at www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org. (Click "About Us" and scroll down the page.) Memberships run for one calendar year and include the following categories:

Sustainer	\$500 or more	Business	\$50
Benefactor	\$250 to \$499	Family	\$30
Partner	\$100 to \$249	Single	\$20
Friend	\$50 to \$99	Student	\$5

For more information about any of our activities, call the Society Office at 540-395-5119. Leave a message if no one answers so we may return your call. Our email address is madisonvahistory@gmail.com.

Our physical address is 412 N Main Street in the town of Madison.