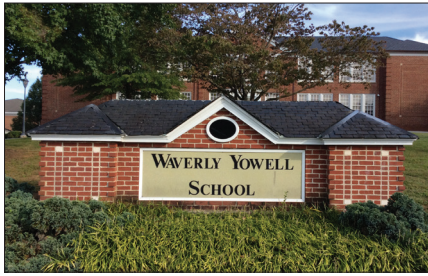


# Preserving Yesterday Enriches Tomorrow



Madison County  
Historical Society

[www.madisonvahistoricalociety.org](http://www.madisonvahistoricalociety.org)

November 2020

## A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

While we continue in the midst of the Pandemic, let me try to keep everyone updated on the activities of the Society.

The Mountain Museum at Criglersville (MMC) was open on both Saturday and Sunday during all three weekends of the Graves Mountain Apple Harvest Festival. We had a lot of visitors who made many nice comments about the displays. Some visitors made promises of additional pictures for those displays. We also hope to add some new members as a result of these openings. We currently plan no additional openings until the Blue Ridge Heritage Project kiosks are installed and ready for formal ribbon cutting and dedication festivities. However, we are happy to open by appointment for anyone wishing to take a peek inside. Call 540-395-5119 and leave a message with your number so we can call back and schedule a time for your visit.

We thank everyone who participated in our August 16 "Open House" at the Mountain Museum. It was great to visit with you! Unfortunately, Covid-19 restrictions continue to impact operations of the Madison County Historical Society in other ways. The September Kemper tea was cancelled, and we must now announce that there will be no November program for our members and guests. The Madison Museum in the Residence has not resumed regular operating hours. We are, however, open by appointment, especially if you want to do holiday shopping in our Gift Shop. Call the Society at 540-395-5119 and leave your name and number so we can get back to you to schedule a visit. We keep our fingers crossed that 2021 will allow us to offer the Spring Tea at Kemper and resume our regular Museum hours.



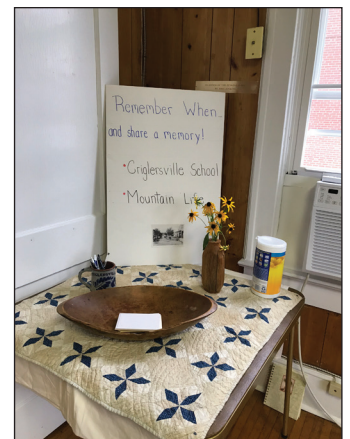
Back to Mountain Museum: Beautiful new shades have been donated and installed in the front room, featuring photographs and documents related to the formation of the Park. Thanks to Martha Breeden and Connie Shotwell Knighting, we have had some wonderful posts on Facebook. We really appreciate all that is being done to help us honor the people who were displaced to form the Shenandoah National Park. We also plan to have a Criglersville room in the MMC and would like to have pictures, etc. about the School and the Community from former teachers, students, and residents of the area. We can either scan or take pictures of the pictures, so we have a copy to display.

Since we derive a lot of our income from membership dues, it would really help in our quest to honor those that were displaced to form the SNP if we could have an increase in memberships. Members receive a newsletter (paper or electronic copy) each quarter. I hope most people realize that most of the improvements made at the MMC have been done by volunteers who donated time or material for projects.

Finally, we hope that all of our readers are safe and healthy and that Society activities can get back to normal in 2021. Thanks for everything.

Max Lacy

President, Madison County Historical Society



## News from Madison County Library

Germanna descendants will find a new and exciting resource for genealogical research at the Madison County Library. The Germanna Database was developed by Cathi Clore Frost and currently includes 132,622 individuals and 42,802 families. Information is included from a variety of sources, including photos, documents, cemetery records, and DNA tests. Library patrons may utilize the database, which is a benefit of membership with the Germanna Foundation. The Madison County Library Board recently donated the membership in honor of Sarah Crigler, a former library director. Visit the library to learn more about the foundation and connect with the deep Germanna roots shared by many local families.

The Library is currently open on Monday through Friday from 10:00 to 5:00 with extended hours on Tuesday and Thursday evenings until 8:00. It is also open on Saturdays from 10:00 until 2:00. Patrons are required to wear masks, have their temperature taken, use hand sanitizer and answer several questions as they check in at the front door.

### Welcome New Members

John Clarke - Crozet, VA

Daisy Rider Breeden - Bristol, TN

Glen & Jennie Hill Robinson -  
Oak Park, VA

Dennis & Nan Coppedge -  
Madison, VA

Matthew & Kelly Kelley - Duet VA

C. J. Gallihugh - Muncie, IN

With these new members, our total membership broke into a new "century"; membership currently stands at 201. Renewal letters for 2021 will be in the mail within the next few weeks. We encourage you to check information on the form and return it when mailing in your check. Indicate any changes on the form, such as choice of hardcopy newsletter vs. e-mail copy. Having the form in hand benefits the bookkeeping process. Thanks for your continued support during 2021.

## From the Editors....

This issue features another article by Kathleen Hoffman who wrote about Madison's "Fire King" in the November 2019 newsletter. Her current work weaves together the wonderful story of two gentlemen who "ran" Madison County Schools for years. You will read about the men, their families, their work, the school systems they led, people they knew, and the schools that now carry their names. Our thanks go to Carty Yowell and Rives Wetsel for furnishing photographs to accompany the article and supplying anecdotes to stimulate Kathleen's musings about their grandfather and father. Reprinting the article from 2006 about old Criglersville schools seemed the perfect way to end this issue. In 2006, who would have predicted that by 2020, one of the "small buildings on the property" would be turned into the Mountain Museum at Criglersville? Compiling the history of this "cottage" is a project begging to be done! Any volunteers??

Another assignment: Study the photograph of William Wetsel and the FFA members. Can you identify the young men and the Forest Ranger?

If you have not yet visited the Mountain Museum, subscribe to our Facebook page Madison County Virginia Historical Society for wonderful photographs of exhibits and updates about projects and openings. And go to the Madison Library. The Library maintains an excellent collection of materials about Madison County history. Volunteers at the Madison Museum often refer visitors to our neighboring big white house on a hill. The Germanna Database is an exciting addition to the Library's collection.

Finally, the usual reminder to our print subscribers: go to [www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org) to enlarge photographs and see the newsletter in full color. JGM



*Agriculture Teacher W.H. Wetsel (on rt.) with FFA Boys*



# School Names in Madison County

By

Kathleen Hoffman

Two of Madison County's school buildings are named for former superintendents of schools. Together, Albon Waverly Yowell and William Henry Wetsel saw the school system through almost half a century and huge growth and changes.

Yowell was born in Madison in 1882 and Wetsel, born in 1910 while his family lived in Charlottesville, grew up in Ruckersville in Greene County. The tremendous growth and development they oversaw included school consolidation and the accompanying construction of buildings, development of a school bus transportation system, and racial integration. They also presided over the expansion of education to meet the changing needs of students - during their time, young people changed from expecting to join a basically farming economy to looking toward college preparation and technical education.

With all this upheaval, the men dealt with youngsters, parents, the school board, the county government and state and federal education departments - all well enough so people of the county agreed they deserved the honor of being remembered as the namesakes of buildings. Waverly Yowell Elementary School is located on North Main Street, while the Wetsel Middle School is next to Madison high.

Yowell served from 1921 to 1949, and Wetsel from 1955 to 1976. The superintendent in between was Samuel Clarks Morgan, who spent about five years in Madison before moving on to Yorktown. All the other progress, beginning with the change from the far-flung collection of 63 white and 18 black one to four-room schools, to the current centrally located buildings and the outlines of the large system that is Madison public education now, could be credited to the two.

Both were superintendents for Greene County at the same time they served Madison, a decision based in economics since funds were tight for both rural counties. Both, obviously, worked hard, and both had farming to attend to on the side.

Waverly Yowell told a Richmond Times Dispatch reporter in 1958 that he got the idea of "serving people" from a teacher in the one-room school in Rappahannock that he attended. But he began teaching without a lot of preparation, and didn't go to Richmond College until he was 25, according to that interview. Afterwards, he went off to spend a year as principal of Lovingson High School in Nelson. When he returned to Madison, he taught near the family farm in Etlan, and was also part-time county agent.

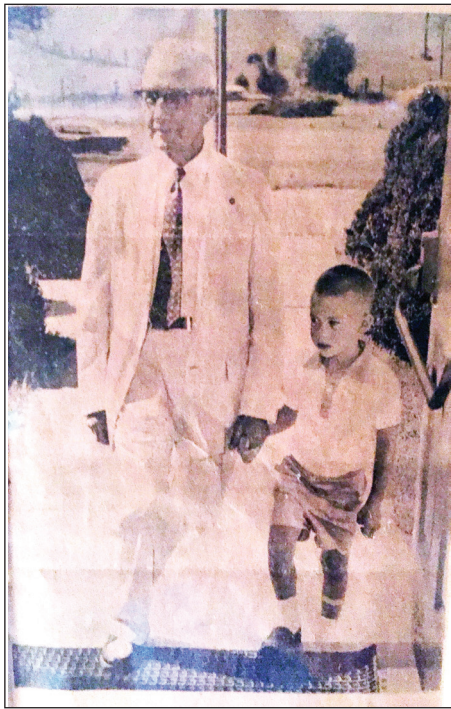
Soon, he was made principal of the Etlan school, and ended up marrying one of the teachers he hired, Mary Elizabeth Hale. They had eight children, five sons and three daughters. A son died in World War II, and one of a number of grandchildren, Carlton (Carty) Yowell, is now on the Madison Board of Supervisors. Carty, as well as Elizabeth and Waverly's only surviving child, Betty Jane Yowell Hall of Richmond, remember a man who was no-nonsense and very, very big on education.

"He had that look," recalls Betty Jane, whose name is actually Elizabeth. "We were to be seen and not heard." When he became superintendent, and came to visit at Etlan, the school attended by his children, "He never looked my way or acknowledged that he was my dad. We were certainly not spoiled." He reviewed his children's report cards and was the parent who signed them, and the report cards had better be good ones.

If Betty Jane couldn't preen because her father was superintendent, she knew he was a significant force - and still does. She met a woman in Richmond who was proud to have a certificate signed by him. "He signed all the diplomas, there certainly wasn't any stamp." People have always told her they felt they got a good education in Madison.



Albon Waverly Yowell



Yowell with grandson Carlton on  
Carty's first day of school

Carty Yowell is the son of Walter Mayo Yowell, the youngest of the eight children. Carty, one of 23 grandchildren, recalls his grandfather as "somewhat aloof and intelligent," a man who "wouldn't drop to the floor and wrestle with you." He sums up the man that he saw quite a bit when he was a young child, visiting the farm for holidays along with his many cousins. "We loved, respected and feared him. We listened intently when he talked to us." The part of his mind that wasn't on education was on farming, and he directed everything that was done there - the family provided the manpower, and they all worked. "You didn't horse around," was the rule.

"He'd go into the mountains and try to talk the mountain folk into sending their kids to school," recalls Carty, who has acted on some ideas of serving people himself. He returned to Madison in 2008 to help care for his parents, and to become finance director of Skyline Community Action Partnership (CAP). He was on the county's planning commission and was its chair for five years, and then ran for supervisor because his impending retirement would leave him more time.

Betty Jane also quickly learned the importance of work. She spent a year in Detroit, but found out the big city wasn't for her and came back to teach home economics and coach at a school in the Northern Neck of Virginia. Her interest was dietetics, though, and after she married (another teacher's brother) they went off to Richmond where she became a dietitian for the schools there. She felt her father was disappointed when she didn't stay in the classroom. "We were a family of teachers," with a couple of brothers teaching agriculture, and one becoming a principal elsewhere.

Yowell's tenure was a busy one. He developed the transportation system, which of course was necessary with the consolidation of schools, and oversaw the construction of the Criglersville Elementary School and the building later named for him. Madison and three other counties built a regional high school for Black students on Route 15 between Culpeper and Orange - the George Washington Carver Regional High School. That building now houses the Carver 4-County Museum commemorating local African-American history.

The building that is now Waverly Yowell Elementary School was first occupied on Nov. 5, 1938, having been built as a replacement for the current high school, which burned the year before. When the present high school was built in 1959, the existing school was renamed to honor Waverly Yowell. It contained only the elementary grades after the restructuring of the annex to become a middle school in 1993.

Yowell told the Times-Dispatch reporter at the time that the naming of the school recalled the feeling he had when he became superintendent. "I thought 'I'm not equal to this job.'" It was a great responsibility, he thought, to be "the name over the school door," because children need to look up to the name in all senses.

Yowell retired about a decade before the dedication. "When they named that school for him it gave him extra years," his daughter Betty Jane is sure. "They usually wait until people die." Retirement hadn't been easy for him to adjust to, in spite of the farm work waiting. "He did love those schools, and when he retired he couldn't shake it off that quick."

Carty Yowell was the first grandchild to attend the school named for Waverly Yowell. "He escorted me into the school; mama had dressed me in blue shorts and a blue shirt." Someone from the Madison Eagle was there to take pictures, and he has a framed copy.

The Wetsel Middle School was a case in which the name was given to the building after the death of the man it was named for. "Red" Wetsel, of course nicknamed for his hair color, also started out teaching agriculture. He had a B.S. in economics from Virginia Tech, received an MS more than a decade later, and also did graduate work at the University of Virginia. Between the two degrees, he served in World War II in Europe.



"Papa" Yowell watching Carty unveiling his  
"Nana" Yowell's painting of the homplace



The school named for him “sprang like an elegant butterfly from the nondescript building which was the high school annex”, editor Greg Glassner wrote in the Madison Eagle. The annex had been constructed some time before, but it was a bare-bones effort to add classrooms in a hurry. There was no cafeteria, gym or library. When it was redone, the upgrade was considerable. It would house grades 6 – 8, and the high school was to be a real senior high.

When the dedication for the newly-named school was held in June of 1993, several hundred government officials, educators, parents and students gathered with his widow, Christobel Childs Wetsel, and his son and daughter to hear a series of speakers. One was Judge David F. Berry, who was on the school board when Wetsel was superintendent. “He was an unusual person,” Berry was quoted in the Eagle, “who never gave you much information about himself or patted himself on the back.” But “he was a resourceful man who had friends everywhere and could take a local need down to Richmond and come back with money that nobody thought was there.”

The superintendent’s daughter, Rives, still lives at the homeplace. She knew her dad worked hard, and was faced with difficult decisions. But “To me, he was just dad,” she said. He was a dad with a great sense of humor, fond of fishing and playing cards, very good at projects around the house. She remembers hearing of a car he and a friend actually built to travel back and forth to Virginia Tech.

Rives Wetsel has worked in mental health in various capacities in the area, and her brother Bill is an associate professor at Duke who does research in the neurosciences.

During the dedication, Judge Berry said Wetsel began teaching in a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp and was a country teacher “when the contract included starting the fire and sweeping the floor.”

Another speaker, school board chair George Volchansky, said when he was interviewed for a job a question arose about hours. “Hours, hell!” Wetsel remarked. “You work until the job’s done.” Volchansky became Wetsel’s assistant, and he did just that. David C. Jones, then chair of the Board of Supervisors, expressed relief and pleasure over the newly redone school. “I didn’t know if we would ever get here.”

While he was superintendent, Wetsel was chosen twice to be a member of a national school superintendent committee to study European school systems. In turn, the Madison school system was selected as an example of an excellent rural example to be visited by educators from third world countries.

But the man people remember wasn’t someone who rested on honors. Eddie Dean, Madison’s long-time wildly successful football coach, agrees with Judge Berry’s thoughts. He recalls Wetsel as “very laid back. In fact, his temperament had a lot to do with his success,” particularly in the era of school integration. He didn’t like public speaking, Dean says, “and about 25 words may be the most I ever heard him say.” But he worked hard behind the scenes.

Dean came to Madison in 1967, and his success made him an institution. Eddie Dean Field at Booster Park is now where the Mountaineers play.

Wetsel was good to work with, Dean recalls. “He was honest as the day is long.” A favorite story is that Wetsel and Volchansky used to make regular trips to Richmond to the State Department of Education, and sometimes took bushels of a Madison staple, apples, as gifts. Apparently while handing out apples, they persuaded someone that the county needed the money for the school building that would be named for him – apparently that money “that nobody knew was there.”

Volchansky’s widow, Jane, describes a very cordial relationship with her husband’s boss. The two couples went to events together, and socialized frequently. Jane was a teacher who went into library science, and was the librarian at the high school and at one point at Waverly Yowell. She was at the high school during integration, and thought it went very well, largely because of the evenhanded approach Wetsel took.



William Henry Wetsel

John Tucker, who now lives near Brightwood, knew Wetsel well when he was growing up near the Wetsel home at Oak Park. During the summer, he helped with farm work, particularly chickens. His memory agrees with Dean's - Wetsel was "easy to talk to, but he didn't talk too much."

Ruth Penn, who also lives near Oak Park and whose husband, Clay, was a farmer who studied agriculture when Wetsel taught, remembers that everyone liked him as an instructor and a man. Teaching agriculture then was very important, she says, because almost everyone had a farm connection, and often students of both genders didn't plan to go farther in school. It was important that they had a foundation.

Billy Mitchell, another former coach at the high school (for 68 years!) echoes the "easy to talk to" summation, and he was taught by Wetsel before he was superintendent. Agriculture, of course - "we all had farms or worked farms."

The building of the new high school was a big event in Madison. Construction started in 1958 and the school opened in the fall of 1959. It was the culmination of consolidation.

When a later school principal, John Dwyer, wrote his master's thesis for his University of Richmond degree, it was called "A Historical Survey of Changes in Education in Madison County 1792 - 1970." In it, Dwyer, who interviewed Wetsel personally, said the facilities were very modern, with "labs for science and language, a large auditorium, a modern library facility and an elaborate home economics area."

A big, careful decision was handled by Wetsel in regard to integration. The 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* made the racial integration of schools the law of the land, causing "controversy throughout Virginia, and Madison was no exception," Dwyer wrote. The thesis adds that a freedom of choice system was put into effect, but that Madison did not really begin total integration until the 1966 - 67 session.

The "freedom of choice" option was used by only a few students. One Black Madison resident, Aaron Garnett, met with Wetsel a number of times, according to a letter to the editor in the *Eagle* in 1999. The letter-writer, Nancy Garnett-Williams, was one of the three Garnett children who were enrolled in Madison high in 1964. In 1965 ten more minority students came to both the high school and Waverly Yowell. Garnett-Williams wrote that "it took men and women from both communities to make equal education a reality in our county."

Dwyer noted in his thesis that "Total integration, although delayed for 12 years, was freely established without any trouble in 1966. The judgement used by the school board, with recommendations from Wetsel, was sound and had led to better race relations in the county."

The times of change and construction weren't over, though. After the schools were in use by both races, more classroom space was needed, hence the annex.

By then, there was no need for the Carver regional high school for Black students, according to "Madison County, Virginia - a Revised History" by Margaret G. Davis. Another regional institution, Piedmont Vocational School, was opened in the building in 1968.

School boards and superintendents had to be nimble - there was no time during the two men's tenures that they could sit back and relax in a sleepy country school system. Something to think about when you look up at the "name over the door."



William & Christobel Wetsel

## KITCHEN SPEAKS ON OLD CRIGLERSVILLE SCHOOL

Ted Kitchen, who attended the Criglersville School for 11 years, spoke to Society on Sunday, February 19th. Using a Lou Mesa print as an illustration he described the history of the schools in Criglersville. An original school was located where the Methodist parsonage is today. Following that a school was built near the present-day site of Mount Shiloh Baptist Church. The building is now located behind the Mountain Store in Criglersville. This building had school rooms on the first floor. The second floor was used by the Odd Fellows.

In 1915 the Criglersville High School was built on the site of the present-day school. It served the pupils of the Robertson District which included, Aylor, Brightwood, Criglersville, Etlan, Nethers, Novum and Syria. It originally had 4 classrooms on the first floor and an auditorium on the second floor. A later addition added another 4 classrooms (2 on the first floor and 2 on the second) in the rear and a porch on the front of the building. The building had a full basement where lunch was served (at a cost of \$0.15). Pupils could bring commodities (i.e. eggs, green beans) to exchange for lunch. There was also a chemistry lab and athletic changing rooms. Agriculture, Shop and Home Economics were taught in other small buildings on the property.



*Criglersville High School*

Mr. Kitchen spoke of Miss Mae Blankenbaker who held the record for longevity as a teacher in Criglersville. She had attended school there as well. Miss Lucy Davis was the principal for 16 years. She was a feared individual. Each morning she appeared at the door and announced "Attention" at which time the pupils had to line up in order to enter the building. During this time, all teachers were single females (no married women were allowed to teach) with the exception of the agriculture and shop teachers. This changed (of necessity) during World War II.

The school became accredited in 1926 and was in existence until January of 1946 when it burned during the night while school was closed for vacation. High school pupils used the outbuildings for the remainder of the year. In the fall of 1946, they began attending the high school in Madison. The elementary school pupils used an abandoned CCC camp until the new elementary school was built.

The school housed 11 grades. There was no kindergarten or 8th grade. Since there were only 8 classrooms some grades were combined. This would be different each year depending on the number of pupils in each class. Mr. Kitchen said that when he was in 4th grade some 4th graders were with the 3rd graders and some were with the 5th graders. He felt fortunate to be with the 5th graders. He felt that the maximum number of pupils in the school at any time was 200. Every Wednesday a different homeroom was responsible for presenting a program in the auditorium for the school. Since there was no gymnasium all activities were outdoors.

The program concluded with a tape showing some activities at the school in 1936. The original silent movie was produced by Frank Moser who was the violin teacher. Besides showing a nine-year-old Ted Kitchen singing we also were treated to a scene with girls dancing, boys and girls playing sports and the Board's own Jane Volchansky playing the violin. Mr. Kitchen concluded with the remark that the Criglersville School had been a large influence in his life.



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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](http://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](mailto:madisonvahistory@gmail.com).

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