

# Preserving Yesterday Enriches Tomorrow



*"Ragged Run Farm"  
Wilmer and Arlene Aylor*



*"Twelve Springs Farm"  
Hunter and Joan Weaver*

Madison County  
Historical Society

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

February 2021

## Against All Odds: Re-Discovering Walker Cobler and His Legacy

By  
Kristie Kendall

The rolling hills dotted with patches of forest and large tracts of grazing land off John Tucker Road in Madison County create a beautiful pastoral image. The landscape is largely unchanged in the last one hundred years and one might easily think that this area had always been large tracts of woodland or farmland. However, the presence of an African-American cemetery here is uncovering a largely forgotten history that will change the way we think about the African-American legacy in Madison County.

In 1850, Madison County's population was 9,331 inhabitants with 50.6 percent enslaved. There were 151 free blacks tabulated, which made up 1.5 percent of the county's population. Between 1850 and 1860, the county's population decreased to 8,854 people, with 4,397 enslaved, demonstrating that half the population was still enslaved. Of the entire African-American population of the county in 1860, 98 percent was enslaved, with 97 free blacks counted. A review of the 1860 population census shows only 24 households being free African-Americans and of those households, only four were shown to hold their own land.<sup>1</sup>

However, a black man by the name of Walker Cobler challenged this statistic and the way that we think about Madison County on the eve of the Civil War. He first appeared in the population census for Madison County in 1850. At that time he was living in the household of George and Lucy Racer, who owned a small farm between Great Run (historically known as Grymes Run) and present day John Tucker Road. In the 1840 census, George and Lucy Racer had a small number of enslaved individuals in their household and it is likely that Walker was previously owned by them. Sometime between 1840 and 1850, Walker Cobler obtained his freedom. In July of 1850, George Racer sold 10 acres of his land to Walker Cobler, and Walker established a homestead there, on a small rise overlooking Great Run.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the odds, and the fact that Virginia officially required free blacks to leave the state after 1806, Walker and a woman named Frances Carpenter (also known as Frances or "Fanny" James) challenged this law and continued to assert their freedom and independence by remaining on their 10 acres of land and raising a family there. Between roughly 1847 and 1861, the couple had six children together, Mary, Priscilla, Laura, Lucy Ann, James and Edward.

Walker Cobler is enumerated in the 1860 agricultural census and through this record we have a unique snapshot to better understand the lives of Walker, Fanny and their young family. They were among the only

<sup>1</sup> Statistics derived from 1850 and 1860 US population census results for Madison County.

<sup>2</sup> Walker was not shown as owning real estate in the 1860 census, but George M Racer sold 10 acres of land to him on July 2, 1850 for \$100. This deed was recorded in Madison County on September 1, 1851.

## A Note From The President

*Since we are still in the midst of the pandemic, I will try to give you a little insight into what has been happening since our last newsletter. Both museums have been closed except for appointments. We had a total of 114 visitors at the Mountain Museum in Criglersville including the open house in August. Not bad for a Museum that has yet to be officially dedicated. We had 60 visitors in 2020 at the Museum in town including two homeschool visits and a private party in January. We were open only 5 days in March due to the pandemic. We will still open by appointment for anyone who wishes to visit. Just call 540-395-5119 and leave your number so that we can call you and set up a date and time. This number can be used for either Musuem. We hope this pandemic will allow us to have a dedication of the Kiosk by the Monument and a Grand Opening of the Mountain Museum in early summer.*

*We have had some donations since the last newsletter. I will mention a few of them, and we will have more detail in the next issue. The largest collection was donated by Chuck Dunn (a retired teacher from D H Conley High School near Greenville North Carolina) including lots of items that he and his students produced from 30+ years of visiting the SNP with surveying and trig classes that he taught. We also received the Woodward Family Genealogy from Buddy Woodward. Everette Weakley donated a booklet about his years as a student at Criglersville School and a poster of the Corbin child that was taken from his family and adopted out instead of being returned as promised. Kristie Kendall donated pictures of her Shotwell Family from Shotwell Hollow. Jim and Gertha Lillard donated some pictures of their families that lived on SNP land. The Communion Set and Minutes book from the now disbanded Shiloh Baptist Church in Criglersville was donated by a former family of that church. We received a desk that is believed to have belonged to Governor Kemper; it is now back home in the Madison Museum. Board members have also brought in numerous things over the last month or so. You will have to visit when we finally open to see how we have displayed these items. We continue to welcome pictures of displaced families that we can scan or copy for display at the MMC.*

*At our December meeting we took official action to name Judy Mahanes as the Editor of our newsletter and Martha Breeden as the Photography Editor. Thanks to both of them for all that they do to put this newsletter together.*

Max Lacy  
President, Madison County Historical Society

## From the Editors....

**From Judy:** First let me thank the Society Board for having the courage to name me as the Editor and Martha Breeden as Photography Editor of this newsletter. When Jill Schreiner retired after many years in the position, we quickly realized that no one of us could fill her shoes. As a retired high school mathematics teacher, I have limited experience in journalism. However, back in my high school days here in the county, I was Editor in Chief of the Mountie Monogram for (the other) MCHS during my senior year. I don't remember whether or not Martha Fishback Breeden took photographs for that publication, but she is invaluable now as the Photography Editor of this one. With her good work and the talents of Tim and Lisa at ZIPrint in Charlottesville, we have managed to produce several newsletters over the last year or so. As always, however, the real heroes of any publishing endeavor are the writers who create the prose that fills our pages. Thank you! And please keep at it!

For this issue, the Society is especially grateful to Kristie Kendall for researching a significant African American settlement in Madison County and describing it in our cover story. This aspect of county history has long been neglected, and we must all resolve to bring an end to that neglect. Having said that, it is with a bit of embarrassment that I invite you to read an article which discusses a cemetery on a tract of land that I own. My father bought this lot back in 1953. The tract, then essentially landlocked, bordered his other acreage and became part of a large pasture. We always referred to the area as "The Graveyard". I went there to hunt for blackberries or greenery for Christmas decorating, but I knew almost nothing about its rich history until I read Kristie's article. Shame on me.

**From Martha:** In this issue, we are happy to feature more quilts from the Madison County Barn Quilt Trail. Our thanks go to Laura DeBoer for allowing us to print her photographs of the Barn Quilts. The photographs accompanying "Against All Odds" were taken by Kristie Kendall on March 11, 2019.

As always, go to [www.madisonvahistoricalociety.org](http://www.madisonvahistoricalociety.org) to enlarge photographs and see the newsletter in full color.

## Membership Report

The Society thanks all those who have renewed their annual membership for 2021. To date we have received 107 renewals. If you have not mailed yours in as yet, we encourage you to do so. Membership dues are our primary means of funding. Also, in order to insure that you receive your newsletters without delay, please keep us informed of any address changes. These can be mailed to the Society at PO Box 467, Madison, VA 22727 or sent via e-mail to [mchsfinance@gmail.com](mailto:mchsfinance@gmail.com).

Since our last newsletter, we welcome Missy Bowler as our latest member.



(Continued from Page 1)

black families in Madison County to be enumerated in the 1860 agricultural census. The Cobler farm included six improved, tilled acres and two unimproved acres, which were likely woodland. The cash value of the farm was \$100 in 1860. The family owned one hog and had likely owned numerous other animals, as the census showed that there was \$430 in animals slaughtered during the year ending June 1, 1860. The family grew five bushels of peas and beans, 10 bushels of white potatoes, 30 bushels of sweet potatoes, 200 pounds of butter, seven tons of hay, three bushels of clover seed and five bushels of grass seed during the year ending June 1, 1860. Additionally, they produced 12 pounds of flax and 3 bushels of flaxseed, which was likely used to make linens and clothing for the family. The seven tons of hay would have been more than enough for the small herd of animals on the Cobler farm, so it is likely that the family would have sold extra to neighbors. While the family was not shown owning cattle, due to the large quantity of butter produced, it is likely that they had owned at least one head and it was among the animals slaughtered during 1860. The census data paints a picture of a small family farm operation, similar to many other Madison County farmers at that time.

By 1870, the Cobler family had taken on the surname of their mother, Fanny James. Some of the older children were adults and established their own families during the decade following the Civil War, with daughters Mary and Priscilla giving birth to several children between 1870 and 1880. On October 1, 1876, Walker Cobler passed away at only 48 years old. It is believed that he was buried in the family cemetery established just to the west of his farmstead.

The years following Walker's death must have been trying for the family, but they undoubtedly leaned on their neighbors that lived nearby. The community around the Cobler-James farm grew rapidly in the decades after emancipation. Ann Johnson, wife of John Baylor Johnson, purchased 30 acres of land from James and Ida Reddish in 1884. Baylor and Ann settled on the northern end of the 30 acre property, which was ultimately divided, with their son, Henry, and his wife, Fannie, taking the southern portion. Several of the James children acquired land of their own near or adjacent to the Cobler/James homeplace. Isaac Brown, who had married Walker and Fanny's daughter, Laura, in 1882, purchased nine acres from James and Ida Reddish in 1887, which was located just east of the homeplace. James "Jim" James, son of Walker and Fanny, purchased 20 acres from the Reddishes in the spring of 1890, northwest of the Johnson lands. Lucy, daughter of Walker and Fanny, purchased six acres adjacent to the homeplace and sister Laura's land, from the Reddishes in 1892. Daughter Sillah purchased two acres from Robert Reddish and wife in 1899. Margaret Carpenter, who had likely been enslaved alongside Walker Cobler by the Racers, also acquired land nearby. She purchased six acres from Blanche and W.P. Yowell in 1894, and had acquired additional adjacent acreage prior to that date.

The beginning of the Twentieth Century in Madison County was a time of increasing self-determination and agency for African-Americans as is evidenced through land ownership. Although only 36 percent of farmers in Madison County in 1910 were black, 95 percent of all black operated farms were owner-operated, in contrast to only 86 percent of white operated farms. The trend towards owner operated farms amongst the African-American population in Madison County was significantly higher than the 67 percent seen statewide<sup>3</sup>

Evidence of this trend is apparent in the small community off John Tucker Road as well. Two of Margaret Carpenter's chil-



Photograph Courtesy Kristie Kendall  
Headstone of Laura James Brown, daughter of Walker Cobler and Frances James.



Photograph Courtesy Kristie Kendall  
View of the cemetery looking north, showing black walnut trees amidst the rows of burials.

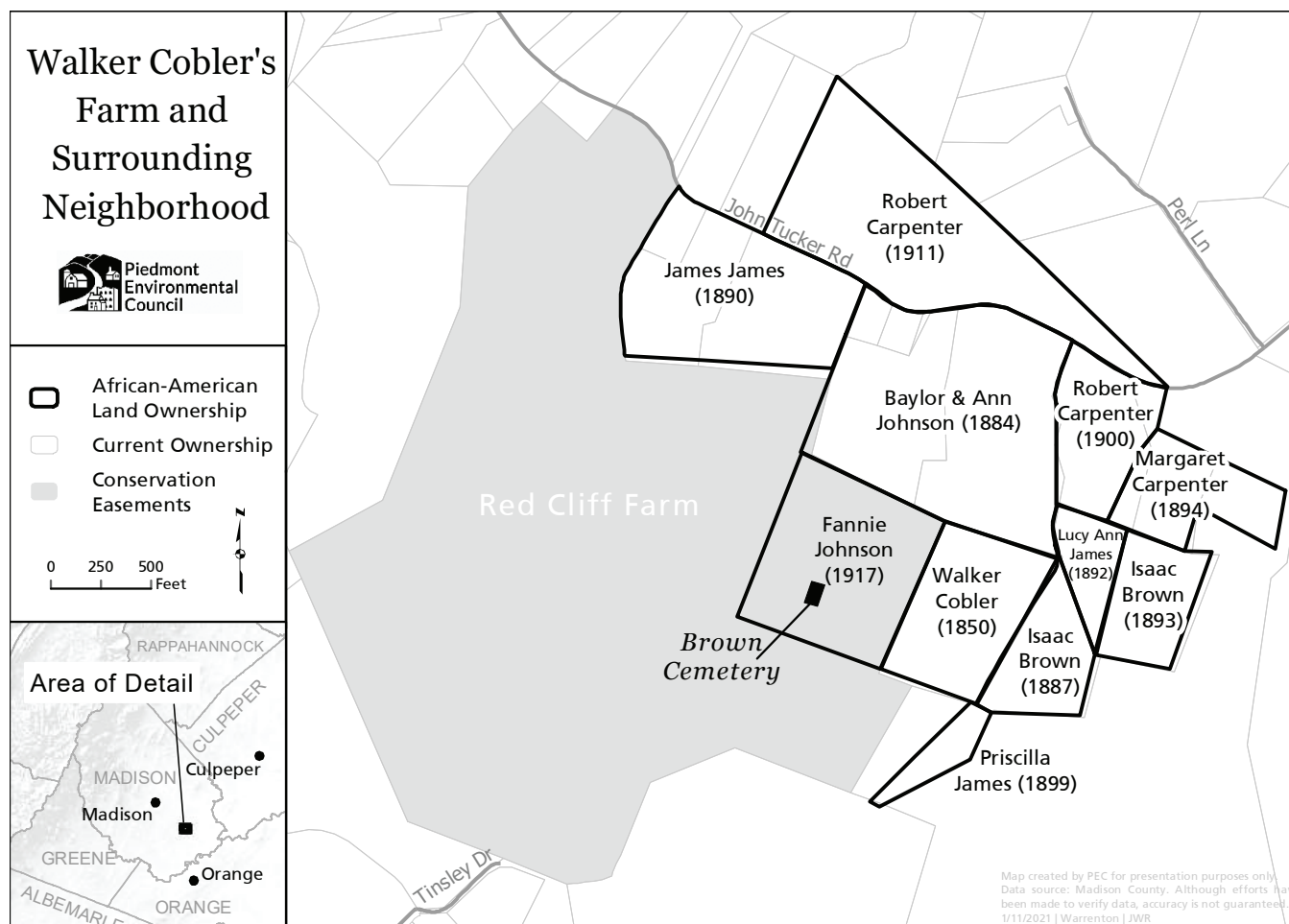
<sup>3</sup> Data compiled from the 1910 Census Abstract Supplement for Virginia, accessed at <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/de-cennial/1910/abstract/supplement-va.pdf>.

dren, Elliott Carpenter and Zora Carpenter, married and remained in the community. Elliott Carpenter married Mary Baker in 1895, daughter of Benjamin and Ella Baker, and purchased Jim James' land off John Tucker Road. Jim James continued to live on the property and Elliott and Mary constructed their own home to the east of his and farmed the land. Zora Carpenter married Hamp Reid in 1894. Zora and Hamp moved from Washington, D.C. back to Zora's home place after her mother's death. She purchased the interest from her siblings in her mother's land in 1910. Margaret's daughter, Ida, had a son, Robert Lewis "Bob" Carpenter, in 1878. He operated his farm and raised his family on a purchased piece of land his grandmother had acquired decades prior.

By 1910, this area off John Tucker Road would have been a lively, bustling place with at least nine families (one of them being a white family renting land in the community) and roughly 40 people residing here. Almost all of the families owned small plots of land that they farmed to provide for their immediate families. The 1910 census also shows the beginnings of a diversification in employment and a shift from farming as a primary occupation to service industry positions. For example, Robert Lewis Carpenter worked as a teamster for a saw mill, meaning he was responsible for loading wagons with lumber to be taken to a local mill for processing. John Baylor Johnson's niece, Lizzie Jackson, who lived with him and his wife in 1910, found employment as a private cook. Priscilla James served as a laundress for a local family. By 1915, every African-American household living in this tight-knit community owned the land on which they lived.

In the fall of 1918, the Spanish Flu reached Virginia, hitting Camp Lee at Petersburg and quickly spreading from there. From death certificates, we can see that the epidemic was raging across Madison County by the holiday season of 1918. On January 13, 1919, Georgia Carpenter, an 11 year old daughter of Elliott and Mary Carpenter, was the first to succumb to the flu in the community. Four days later, Jim James died on January 17. Three days later Isaac Brown died. Isaac's wife, Laura (James) Brown followed on January 25. Although no death records can be located for Isaac and Laura's two children, it is believed that they succumbed to the flu as well.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The 1910 census shows them as living children of Laura Brown and daughter Julia resided in the home with her parents. By 1919, when the estate of Isaac and Laura is in chancery proceedings, there are no immediate living heirs, so it is suspected that both children were deceased at that time.





In twelve days' time, this community buried between 10 and 15 percent of its residents in the same cemetery where Walker Cobler had been buried decades prior.

In the years following the Spanish Flu, much of this land remained in the ownership of some of the same, original families, but the population of the community decreased dramatically in size. Baylor and Anne Johnson's son, John B Johnson, sold the land he inherited from his parents to Robert Lewis "Bob" Carpenter, who purchased several parcels. Zora Carpenter Reid and her husband, Hamp, acquired some of Isaac and Laura Brown's estate, when their property went into chancery following their deaths, including the Walker Cobler home place. They lived there until Hamp Reid's death in 1935. Raymond Nelson, their nephew, acquired the property in 1940 and it remains in the hands of the Nelson heirs today. Elliott Carpenter and his family remained on their property on John Tucker Road until Elliott's death in 1972. Robert Lewis Carpenter, Jr., the son of "Bob" Carpenter, eventually acquired nearly 130 acres here, which he owned until his death in 2001.<sup>5</sup>

Today there are only a handful of reminders of this once thriving community, the most important being the community cemetery. Standing on a knoll amongst black walnut trees overlooking the Mahanes Farm to the west and Great Run to the south, the cemetery has numerous uninscribed fieldstones. Two engraved headstones mark the burials of Isaac Brown and his wife, Laura James Brown. The cemetery is laid out in roughly three long rows with burials oriented in the east-west direction. A visual assessment of the cemetery indicates that there are roughly 25 marked burials but likely upwards of 50 burials due to the number of unmarked depressions. Based on death records information, the cemetery was likely active from the mid-1870s, with the death of Walker Cobler in 1876, until the 1930s. It is believed that most of Cobler-James, Baylor and Ann Johnson, and Carpenter families are buried here.

The cemetery is owned today by Judy Mahanes, part of a larger 168-acre farm, which has been in her family since the 1890s. Her farm includes part of the land originally owned by the Baylor and Ann Johnson family, which remained in the Johnson family into the 1950s. In 2013, Judy placed her farm into a conservation easement, held by The Piedmont Environmental Council, which will permanently protect the land and includes a special provision protecting the cemetery and its funerary markers.

Judy's commitment to protecting her farm and the cemetery on it is an important step in identifying, documenting and preserving important historic sites across the state, which tell the story of historically under-represented and marginalized communities. The story of Walker Cobler and Margaret Carpenter is an incredible one that deserves more attention, but these tales of remarkable people and their triumph against adversity can be found in communities across the state. Recognizing these unique histories and preserving these important places are a crucial part of telling the full American story.



Photograph Courtesy Kristie Kendall  
Judy Mahanes looks at one of the headstones in the cemetery on her property.

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<sup>5</sup> The chain of title for the Walker Cobler property is incomplete, but the land tax books for 1940 show that Zora Reid, Hamp Reid's wife, sold the land to George Nelson in 1940.



*Kristie Kendall is the Historic Preservation Coordinator for the Piedmont Environmental Council. She is member of the Madison County Historical Society and Second Vice President of the Germanna Foundation. Kristie has roots in Madison County and was instrumental in the establishment of the Blue Ridge Heritage Project. She currently resides in Warrenton with her husband Don, two children, and two pups.*

# SNP Records Digitization Project

The Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC), in partnership with James Madison University (JMU), has undertaken a project to digitize thousands of legal documents pertaining to the State of Virginia's condemnation of private land for the creation of the Shenandoah National Park (SNP). The project began in 2017 when JMU partnered with the Rockingham County Clerk's Office to digitize over 6,000 documents relating to the condemnation of lands in Rockingham County. This digitization project will make all of the deed book records, court proceedings and individual condemnation case files publicly accessible and searchable via an online database, where individuals can look up information about specific properties within Shenandoah National Park. The database for Rockingham County, now complete, is hosted by James Madison University and can be viewed here: <https://omeka.lib.jmu.edu/erp/>

PEC hopes to continue this project by digitizing Park condemnation records in Madison County. Currently, access to records relating to the Shenandoah National Park condemnations in Madison is limited. Deed books, which contain the muniments of title for the condemned properties, surveyor descriptions of each tract of land being condemned and lists of ownership and surveyors are the only documents readily available to the public in the clerk's office. The condemnation cases, appraisals, surveys and other information pertaining to individual properties acquired for (or assessed for inclusion in) Shenandoah National Park are in boxes in the storage room of the clerk's office. Most of the public does not know they exist or how to find them.

In order to complete the project in Madison County, PEC is currently seeking approximately \$11,000.00 to hire an intern who would be responsible for the scanning of each record from the condemnation files and creating PDFs with associated metadata. Anyone interested in contributing funds for this project is asked to contact Kristie Kendall at [kkendall@pecva.org](mailto:kkendall@pecva.org) or Max Lacy at 540-718-8889 or [maxlacy40@gmail.com](mailto:maxlacy40@gmail.com).

## Pandemic 2020-2021

# What is Happening in Madison County?

In this article, we announce a campaign to record our current circumstances in a way that will benefit future historians. Pam Nelson is spearheading the project. She recently reminded the Historical Society Board that 2020 has been an extraordinary year with many changes and adaptations due to COVID-19. She asked Board members to share memories of the impact on their everyday lives in Madison County during this unique time. We now ask all our readers to contribute to this project. Your recollections can be short and sweet ("The one thing I will always remember about 2020 is....."), but we also want longer responses with details that are specific to you. Almost everyone will say that toilet paper was hard to obtain; we want to document the steps you had to take to get the supplies and masks you needed? We seek memories of personal things that happened to you, memories that perhaps only you know.

There are few rules. Length and format are up to you. You may write by hand and mail information to us. You may reply via email to the newsletter's email address. Contributions will be placed in a binder or folder for future generations to consult as they look back on this challenging time. Therefore, there is one important request: label your submission with your full name, the date, and a statement giving the Madison County Historical Society permission to retain and use your information.

Possible Topics: Holidays, Family Events (weddings, funerals, birthdays, reunions), Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities, Medical Issues and Appointments (for family and pets), Shopping and Restaurants, Haircuts, Church Services, Schools and College, Work and Volunteering, Virtual Meetings (Zoom), Sports, Travel and Vacations.....

Send responses to [Madhistory467newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:Madhistory467newsletter@gmail.com)



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

## Remember this Photo??

It first appeared in our November 2020 issue. Thanks to Anne Meade Falconer, Jean Durham Busboso, and Max Lacy, we can now identify the men in this picture that dates to 1952-53.

Back Row (l to r): Game Warden Bill Pattie, Thomas Lohr, Harold Faulconer, Don Utz, Frederick Lohr, Teacher William H Wetsel

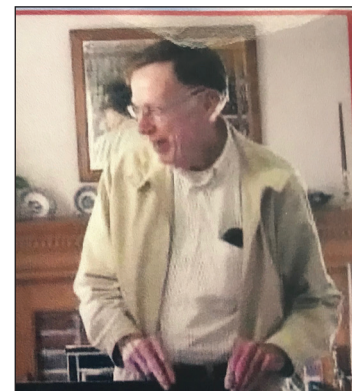
Front Row (l to r): William H Garth, Lee Gibson, Willie Walker, Ronnie Carpenter

# Tribute to Maury Hanson

Compiled by Penn Bowers

The Madison County Historical Society Board was saddened to learn this past December that a former member of the Board, Maury Hanson, died in May.

Maury joined the Board in October 1999. He was responsible for the restoration of the Law Office and the Slave Quarters dependencies of the Kemper residence and tirelessly pursued grant support and community fund raising efforts for these restoration projects. When adequate funding was obtained he secured the necessary approval from the State Department of Historic Resources, procured the services of the prime contractor, and oversaw the projects. The complete sequence of events involved in the restoration of the Slave Quarters is contained in the November 2009 issue of the Newsletter. At a luncheon, the Board honored all those individuals responsible for the restoration of the Slave Quarters and the Society presented Maury with a framed photograph of the two Kemper dependencies and a text that read: "To Maury Hanson, without whose tireless efforts the restoration of the Law Office and Slave quarters on the grounds of the Kemper Residence would not have been accomplished. Presented by the Madison County Historical Society, November 6, 2009."



Maury Hanson in 2009

Maury also proved to be an excellent historic researcher when investigating the provenance of two portraits that were contributed to the society in 2005. One was obviously of Robert E. Lee and the other was a woman presumed at first to be his wife. Maury was able to eventually identify the portrait as one of Martha Washington made in the studio of Elijah C. Middleton (1818-1883) in Cincinnati, Ohio around 1866, and that the portrait was used on U.S. postage stamps from 1902 to 1922 and on U.S. one dollar silver certificates 1886 to 1901. Maury also investigated the metal plate found under the eaves of the Slave Quarters and discovered that the two scenes in George Rawlinson's "Seven Great Monarchies Of the Eastern World" were identical to those on the plate.

Maury served on the Board as recording Secretary from 2006 until his retirement and provided perceptive observations and sage advice at Board meetings in addition to what has been mentioned above. Thank you, Maury Hanson. RIP

## Board of Directors Election

The Board of Directors of the Historical Society consists of twelve members, each serving staggered three-year terms, so that four memberships expire each year. Members of the Society elect four new members to the Board at the first general membership meeting of the calendar year which normally occurs in February. Due to the COVID-19 virus the 2021 February general membership meeting will not be held. Article IV, section 3 of the bylaws states:

*The Board of Directors shall be elected at the first regular membership meeting of the calendar year. A Nominating Committee shall nominate members. Nominations may also be made from the floor. Anyone so nominated must have agreed in writing to serve prior to the nomination. A Board member whose term has expired may be re-elected.*

As noted above, in addition to the nominations by the nominating committee, a member can run for a seat on the Board by submitting his or her desire in writing prior to the general membership meeting. These can be submitted to a current Board member or by mailing them to the Society at P.O. Box 467, Madison, VA.

The current members of the Board whose terms expire in 2021 are as follows: Judy Mahanes, Martha Breeden, Penn Bowers and Jean Busboso. All are willing to serve another three-year term if re-elected.

The full content of the By-Laws can be accessed on the Society's web page at [www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org).

## Luncheon Teas Still on Hold

Since the fall of 2002, the luncheon teas hosted by members of the Society have been a major source of financial support for our organization. Enthusiastic response from community friends has made the semi-annual events an overwhelming success over the years.

No one was more disappointed than the Tea Team when Covid-19 concerns made it necessary to cancel the event planned for last March. Again in September, safety restrictions from the governor would not allow us to gather in the limited space at the Kemper Residence. Because the governor's restrictions are still in place, we cannot plan a tea for spring 2021.

The Tea Team is optimistic that conditions will improve so we can get back on track and gather at a tea in September. Only time will tell.



Madison County Historical Society  
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Address Service Requested



*"Nan's Fancy Lattice"*  
*Dennis and Nan Coppedge Farm*

[www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org)  
[madisonvahistory@gmail.com](mailto:madisonvahistory@gmail.com)

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.