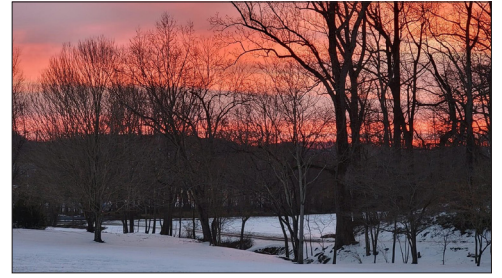


Preserving Yesterday Enriches Tomorrow



Madison County
Historical Society

www.madisonvahistoricalociety.org

February 2022

Charles F. Ross, MD: Doctor on Horseback

By
Edward Berry

The Mountain Museum at Criglersville would be remiss in its mission of acknowledging the mountain culture of Madison County without taking note of the Ross family of Criglersville. Dr. Charles Fordyce Ross (1881-1965) and his two sons, Charles Justis Ross (1908-1980) and Hugh Rudasill Ross (1909-1981), were the foremost leaders in service to the Criglersville and mountain communities and to Madison County, as a whole, during the early and mid-twentieth century.

Charles Fordyce Ross was born in Taylor County, West Virginia, the son of a Brethren minister and his wife. He was educated locally and his father, as he did for each of his six children, paid for one year of classes at Juniata College in Pennsylvania. Upon completion of that one year, he returned home to work on his father's farm and to teach; he saved his money and continued his education at the University of West Virginia. After finishing his degree requirements, he enrolled at the Medical College of Virginia. He graduated MCV at Richmond in 1905, practiced medicine for a few years, and married Bessie Irene Rudasill of Oak Park. The Rudasills were well respected with strong ties across southeastern Madison County. He went on to complete surgical school in New York to acquire skills which would be valuable in his practice.



Dr. Ross with a relative from West Virginia
Photo Courtesy Cathryn Ross

Dr. Ross was invited to take over the practice of Dr. Charles O. Simms, local doctor who resided near Etlan. The Rosses established their home and office in Criglersville. Their granddaughter now lives at the site of his final office and home.

Horse and buggy was the primary mode of transportation, as roads, if existent, were in terrible condition and barely passable in winter or after extensive rains. Mountain roads were little more than paths and trails. Patients could come to the office, but it was customary for doctors to come to their patients, especially to the critically ill or injured. Communication was difficult with few telephones in the county; many patients' families rode or walked to the nearest neighbor with a phone. Mrs. Ross would take the message and deliver it to her husband.

Charles J. Ross (son) described in an interview the mountain people's firing of a shotgun up and down the mountain as a means of communication. Different shots indicated the nature of the visitor coming onto the mountain. One series denoted the presence of revenue officers.

But they had another signal in those mountains back there. I'm talking about in Nether's Mill, which consisted of Nicholson Hollow, Corbin Hollow and Weakley Hollow, and then we'd come

(Continued on Page 4)

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

If you like snow, you are in luck. We were snow-free, for the most part, the last two winters, but we are catching up fast this winter. I agree that it is pretty as long as you don't have to deal with it. It sounds like we may be blessed with more in the near future

As I was writing for the last newsletter, I thought things were improving as far as the virus was concerned, but along comes a new variant that is much more contagious than the previous strain. It seems to be a lot milder, but it still must be dealt with very carefully. Let's hope this one will soon die out and we can get on with life in a more normal manner. Please be very careful as to where you go and what you do. Take care of yourself and be very mindful of your neighbors so as to protect them as well. With this said, it comes as no surprise that the Society has decided not to plan a quarterly membership meeting this February.



We have had a lot of projects in the works for some time, and since the last newsletter we have gotten a few of them done. Thanks to Madison County, we now have a really nice sign announcing our Madison Museum at Kemper. There are actually two signs as the first one says Kemper Museum and the second one points to the circle where the entrance to the Madison Museum is. I am not sure who designed the signs, but they did an outstanding job. Thanks to Madison County for doing such a nice job of getting all of the signs done and erected. The public should have no problem finding the different county offices now.

There has been some work done at the Kemper Residence as well. The blinds have been washed and the windows cleaned. As you will notice when you arrive, landscaping in front of the Museum has been completed. A donation was made to contribute to the cost of this work, and the Board chipped in to finish the project. Bushes were trimmed, plantings were done, and the area was mulched. This work will really make things look nice for our

reopening March 1, 2022. Our volunteers will also notice that new brick walls have been built at the back entrance. We are hoping that these walls will help keep some of the debris from blowing in on the steps. They will also improve the safety at the back door. Volunteers, please check this out and let us know what you think of what we have done.

We have also painted the downstairs at the Arcade. Last fall, we received a painting of the Meander Plantation (commissioned in 1939 by George Shearer who bought the property for his daughters Judith and Julia) at Locust Dale that we want to hang on a wall at the Arcade. The name Meander comes from the Robinson River meandering through the property on the way to meeting the Rapidan River at Rapidan. This painting shows all of the buildings and grounds before it was divided over the years. Our thanks go to Sue Clark for providing this as a loan for us to display. The original plantation consisted of over 4000 acres, land patented in 1726 to Col. Joshua Fry who held the first English patent in what is now Madison County. Fry and Peter Jefferson (Thomas's father) surveyed and drew the first map of Virginia which now hangs at Harvard.



At the Mountain Museum, we have installed a combo heat/air window unit and mounted the rifle and shotgun that were donated to the Mountain Museum. Judy Mahanes has been very faithful in cataloging the items that we have displayed there. Buddy Woodward has decorated the cubby previously used for storage with all kinds of research papers and pictures. There is a genealogy printout of all of the families that are listed on the Monument along with lots of information about the families that were displaced to form the SNP. We

Activity at the Mountain Museum is a little bit different. That museum is new, and things that are new usually draw more curiosity seekers than older things do. We had two special days there as well. Dedication was held on June 27th, and we had a large crowd. The special skills day on September 12th drew another large crowd as well. I am not sure how accurate our count is for those two days, but for the year we have counted (at least) 563 visitors on 61 open days. We are so pleased that the local families have been so supportive of this venture with their attendance as well as their willingness to donate items and funds to help with this project. Everything at the Mountain Museum has been donated with the exception of the utility bills, which are paid from our regular funds each month.

We look forward to reopening on March. 1, 2022 in Madison and on March 6, 2022 in Criglersville, but if you or a group would like to visit before then, just call our Madison Museum number (540-395-5119) and leave a message. We will return your call and set up a date and time for your visit to either or both of our museums.

Please be safe as we navigate this virus, and we look forward to your visit.

Max Lacy, President

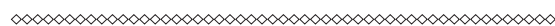
Drive By Tea Planned for March 30

Twenty years ago, a group of volunteers began offering Luncheon Teas as a means to raise funds for the Society. The tradition continues in 2022, but with the "Covid Twist". As with the past two teas, you will receive the same delicious food items that would be offered inside the Kemper Residence, but in convenient packaging that you can Drive By and pick up to enjoy at home. After experience with the past two teas, the group has become adept at selecting items to prepare that will travel well in their special containers for hot or cool food.

Regular attendees have found ways to create their own tea parties. Several friends pick up their food items and meet at a central place to enjoy the luncheon with a cup of tea. One takes portions to two different shut-ins. Another patron invites four or five friends to join her for a delicious luncheon where she did not need to prepare the food.

Please plant to support the Madison County Historical Society in this fun and unique way. Reservations are available by e-mailing maryhaught@hughes.net or by calling 540-718-2175. The price is still only \$30 per person, and the entire amount is a donation to the Society.

We hope conditions in the fall will make it possible to safely return to in-person teas inside the historic Kemper Residence.



From the Editor....

Take a close look at Max Lacy's "A Note from the President" in this issue. It doubles as a substantial Annual Report for the Society. Covid restrictions and concerns may have kept us from holding our traditional, quarterly membership meetings, but they certainly have not sent the Society into hibernation. And many thanks go to Ed Berry for his research into the Ross family. I suspect he found more material than he could fit into this article.

The usual reminders:

- Past issues of this newsletter may be accessed at www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org.
- Print subscribers can go to the same site to enlarge photographs and see the newsletter in full color.
- We welcome feedback and letters to the editor. Our addresses are madhistory467newsletter@gmail.com for electronic submissions and PO Box 467, Madison, VA 22727 for paper.

~~~Judy Mahanes

over on this side of the mountain we had Richards' Town, Dark Hollow and to the top of the Top of the Mountain...Fisher's Gap and then we had another hollow in the Rapidan River on the west side of the county that a lot of people lived...They had regular signals for revenue officers...every family had a shotgun and they had certain signals start at the bottom of the mountain till they got to the top. When my Daddy would go in the mountain they had another signal. They would shoot that thing up through the mountain and then they would come down to the road from their homes to see him as he passed by.

There Dr. Ross would see them, diagnose their illness, give out medicine and return in a few days if they were desperately ill. Prepared medicines were rare, so Dr. Ross made his own medicines and filled his own prescriptions. He bottled his own brand of cough medicines and knew all of the home remedies. A former patient remembered, "it seemed to us girls, that Dr. Ross dispensed a little pink pill for everything. It tasted terrible and was difficult to get down. My father would put it in jelly or anything that could be swallowed without chewing." In an unusual case, as Dr. Ross was headed up into the mountains and making his way up the Hughes' River, he encountered a Mr. Jenkins who lived on the Rappahannock County side. Mr. Jenkins told Dr. Ross that five of his six children were sick. Dr. Ross diagnosed the illness as diphtheria but did not have enough of the antitoxin. Dr. Ross instructed Mr. Jenkins to go to Madison get the medicine and Dr. Ross would administer it to the sick children later that evening on his way back. Mr. Jenkins made the trip to Madison, got the medicine and Dr. Ross later that evening administered it to the children, and they all recovered from that dread disease.



*Dr. Ross with granddaughters  
Bessie & Cathryn*  
Photo Courtesy Cathryn Ross

Dr. Ross was a noted diagnostician. There was a lady who lived on the upper end of Quaker Run who became ill with symptoms that were not noted in this area. Her condition did not improve. One day while riding over Chapman Mountain, it came to Dr. Ross that her symptoms were those found in patients ill with malaria, a malady unknown to Madison County. He rode to the lady's home and asked if she had ever been ill with malaria. It was unlikely as she was a lifelong resident of the area. She replied that as a child she had been in Georgia visiting relatives and had contracted the disease. He told her, "Well, you have it now," treated her with quinine, and she recovered. After the 1942 flood, a local young man became very sick. Dr. Ross diagnosed scarlet fever. His parents assumed the family would be quarantined because it was a communicable disease. No other cases appeared in the area and as the family had not been away from their farm for further exposure Dr. Ross sent his sisters back to school and no one else in the family or the area came down with the disease.

Dr. Ross rarely kept records but relied on his diagnostic skills and his knowledge of his patients and their families. His rule of thumb was not to make a diagnosis of a patient until he had looked at them three times. One of his patients came to him with a complaint and Dr. Ross told the gentleman that his father had it, his brother died from it, and he now had it, and he was correct in his diagnosis.

Dr. Ross charged reasonable fees for his services. If a bill was sent, it was never acted on for collection. He felt that his patients would pay what they could. In cases requiring hospitalization, he referred his patients to Martha Jefferson Hospital in Charlottesville and often transported them himself.

The real test of his mettle and as a doctor who truly served his patients and his community occurred during the "Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1917-1918". His son Charles explained in an interview about his father,

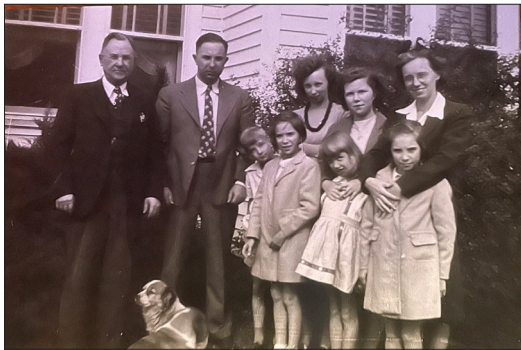
Well that was about 1918, I think it had reached its peak. People were dying like flies all over the country. It seemed like everybody in the county had the flu. Those calls came in and my mother would accept them and she would write them up and they were just numerous. And so he worked out a system. He would go up to Nether's Mill and across Old Rag Mountain and then back home. It would take him from 2 to 3 days to do that. He would just go from home to home and then he would come back home, rest for 3 or 4 hours, get a fresh horse and start out again and be gone for about 3 days before he got back home. That went on for weeks and weeks that winter. Snow was on the ground and the creeks were frozen over. It was very cold that winter and he had to ride a horse everywhere. He had three horses then and it was his sons' responsibility to tend to the

horses and care for them upon his return. He needed a fresh horse at all times. On some occasions his feet would actually freeze to the stirrups. My mother kept a tea kettle on the wood stove, and he would call for her to come out and she would pour that hot water on the stirrup and he could get off of the horse. He went from Piney Hollow in Rappahannock County, three or four miles north of Nether's Mill (This reference may have been to Pine Hill Gap which lies north of Nethers and fits the narrative.) and then he'd follow Old Rag Mountain, Double Top and Fork Mountain to Fletcher (Greene County), about a forty-mile trip across the length of the mountains. In later years, he would go up to the Skyline Drive, drive back on the mountain, and walk down to see his patients who lived in the mountains.

Dr. Ross cared deeply for his community and wanted to see living conditions improve for his patients and to see the county develop a strong school system. Politics were not important to him. The county was divided into three districts with schools overseen by Trustees selected for each district. The school serving the Criglersville area was located closer to Aylor than Criglersville and hardly accessible to the children living in the mountains. Dr. Ross advocated to the Superintendent for the school to move to Criglersville with the county providing transportation for the students. The Superintendent feared he would be terminated if he made such a proposal and refused; Dr. Ross was undaunted. He discovered that the school trustees had been improperly selected and threatened that if changes were not made, he would take the matter to the County Grand Jury.

Madison County was closely controlled by a "Courthouse Ring." Dr. Ross' threat had its desired effect, and his candidate was chosen as the new school trustee for the Robertson District (including Criglersville) and changes were made. A four-room schoolhouse was built in Criglersville and later a high school. The Criglersville community supported the school wholeheartedly, and that community support has continued for many years, to include the present Mountain Museum which is housed on Criglersville School property. Former students and their families regularly visit to tell stories and offer items to be displayed and help us in our mission of supporting and interpreting our mountain culture.

As Dr. Ross advanced in years, his practice slowed down, and he could no longer make house calls. He would see patients in his home. One of his later patients Ollie W. Kitchen, Jr. described to me his appreciation of Dr. Ross's skills. As a youngster he seriously injured his fingertips in a lawn mower accident. He was taken to Dr. Ross for treatment. Ollie feels that it was the skilled care he received from Dr. Ross that saved his fingers; he recovered without signs of the severe mutilation they suffered. Dr. Ross did stop seeing patients eventually, and out of respect for his patients and their confidentiality he destroyed all of their records such as they were. Although a denizen of Criglersville upon his death, he was laid to rest beside his wife at her home church, Mount Zion Baptist at Oak Park.



*Ross Family*  
Photo Courtesy Cathryn Ross

service is the quality of the persons who serve as pall bearers at his burial. The quality of those who gave that last tribute to Dr. Ross is the best estimation of his life and his service to Madison County. In this honor, the Criglersville and Oak Park communities exhibited their best: E.E. Aylor, Jr., Ray Berrey, Joe Goodall, Charles M. Thomas, Jr., Robert N. Finks, Roy Strickler and Ed Argabright. Pastor T.A. Graves preached the funeral.

Author's Note: In preparation of this article the following sources were consulted: the obituary of Dr. Charles F. Ross, (SNP 105) "Charles Ross interviewed by Dorothy Noble Smith, transcribed by Alan S. Brenner, 10-16-1978," James Madison University, JMU Scholarly Common, Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection, JMU Special Collections, the ledgers of Dr. Charles O. Simms, Madison County, Virginia, interviews with former patients and persons familiar with Dr. Ross and his legacy. A special note of thanks is given to Ollie W. Kitchen Jr., Jane Coates Volchansky, and Dennis and Nan Coppedge for reviewing this article and making helpful suggestions drawn from their own experiences and knowledge of the people and the area.



*Mt. Zion Baptist Cemetery, Oak Park, VA*



## Board of Directors Election

Article IV, Section 3 of the Society's By-Laws states:

*The Madison County Historical Society Board of Directors shall be elected by the general membership. One third of the Board shall be elected at the first designated 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 a result of the Covid pandemic the Society had no quarterly membership meetings in 2021; accordingly, there was no election to replace the four members whose terms were expiring. Those members being: Penn Bowers, Martha Breeden, Jean Busboso, and Judy Mahanes. All of these members were willing to serve another three-year term if presented by the nominating committee and re-elected by the membership.

The four members whose terms are expiring in 2022 and whose replacements are to be elected at the first scheduled meeting in this year are: Arlene Aylor, Mike Hale, Max Lacy, and Pam Nelson. Arlene Aylor, Max Lacy, and Pam Nelson are present Board members, each willing to serve another three-year term if presented by the nominating committee and re-elected by the membership. Mike Hale will retire from the Board, and the nominating committee is pleased to present Dennis Coppedge as his replacement.

At the first scheduled meeting of this year, whenever it occurs, the nominating committee will place both of these slates before the membership.

If any of our membership wish to serve on or nominate someone for the Board you are encouraged to do so.

*Penn Bowers, Chair of Nominating Committee*

# Membership Report

Many thanks for your quick responses to the renewal letter. Early renewals are much appreciated as your dues are a major support of the Madison County Historical Society. If you have not renewed your membership yet, I encourage you to get your dues in soon. If you are having trouble deciding on a gift for someone, remember that a gift membership in our Society is always a great idea. Also, please keep us apprised of any mailing or email address changes so the newsletters will reach you in a timely fashion.

We welcomed five new members this quarter:

Patricia Gibbs Hobgood, Buffalo Junction, VA

Possum's Store, Madison, VA (Criglersville)

William Lacy, Richmond, VA

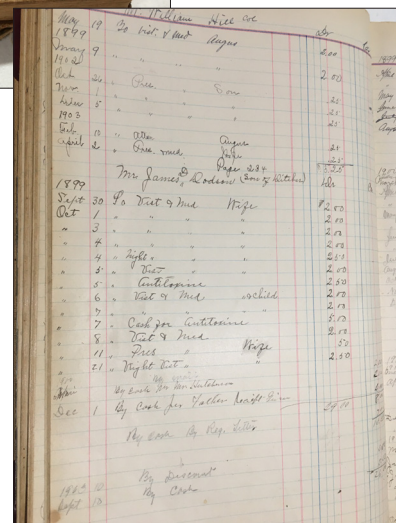
Cassity Lacy, Charlottesville, VA

Nancy Ellen McVay, St. Petersburg, FL

~~~Arlene Aylor, Membership Chair

Charles O. Simms, MD

Ed Berry notes in his article on Charles Ross, MD that Dr. Ross destroyed his patient records upon retiring from the profession. Such was not the case with his predecessor Dr. Charles Simms. The Madison County Historical Society currently has in its possession two volumes detailing the work of Dr. Simms. One covers 1888-1897 and the other 1898-1904. For the most part, each page is headed by the name of a head of household. Under that is a listing by date of medical services provided to the family: patient, a brief description of the service, and fee. Fees range from \$1.00 for a call to \$5.00 for delivering a baby. A daytime visit costs \$2.00 with the fee rising to \$2.50 for a night visit. A quick look through the pages reveals that Dr. Simms often made repeat visits to a household within the same week, often on consecutive days and occasionally twice on the same day. He also seems to have done a bit of shopping along the way; on one page, he noted that he bought two bushels of corn for \$4.00.



Entries made by Dr. Simms
in 1899

Madison County Historical Society
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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.