

November 2025

The program will be held in the Madison County Administrative auditorium, 414 N Main Street, at 2pm on Sunday November 16, 2025. Everyone is invited to attend.

A Note From The President

It is time for our 4th newsletter of 2025. We have been busy with tours and a program since the last newsletter. We have had more visitors at the Madison Museum at Kemper than last year, and the volunteers have been working hard to keep things neat and orderly for them. We would still welcome people that are willing to volunteer. You would not have to be a docent at the Museum because there are other ways to volunteer, such as publicity, cleaning, updating files, organizing new exhibits, or updating inventory. If you are interested, please contact a Board member, go to madisonvahistory@gmail.com or call 540-395-5119. Leave a message; someone will contact you.

Our August Program on September 21, 2025, was very well attended. It was good to have the group of people that were in charge at the time of the flood in 1995 talk about what they did that day and in the following days and weeks. Response was a total team effort that showed what we all have come to know about Madison County when a crisis hits. What a great County to be a part of.

We are now planning the Colonial Days Exhibition for the 4th grades classes at Waverly Yowell School. The event on November 24, 2025, will feature skills that were prevalent during the early days of this country.

Robby Richards and Carolyn Yowell are new volunteers at the Mountain Museum. Both have family displaced to form the Shenandoah National Park, so it is good to have them. Jacey Howell (high school senior participating in Governors School) has also been a great help with our various projects. We are pleased with her participation and enthusiasm for history. She has been involved with projects at both Museums and will write a paper about her experience.

Our November Program will honor Madison County Veteran Robert William Yowell, who died at the hands of the Japanese on February 10, 1945. In 2015 the bridge over the Robinson River at Banco was dedicated to his honor by the Commonwealth of Virginia. On November 16th, members will also be asked to vote on a proposed change to the by-laws of the Society. (See page 7 for details.)

You can do your Christmas shopping early at Madison Museum or the Mountain Museum if your interest is in history. Lots of books and other items are for sale at both Museums. All proceeds help us continue our goal of preserving the history of Madison County for future generations. The Mountain Museum's last day will be December 14, 2025, and the Madison Museum's last day will be December 18, 2025. Both Museums can be toured via special request by calling 540-395-5119. Leave contact information so someone can contact you to set up a date for your tour. Both Museums will reopen in early March 2026.

Please keep the families of Donnie Daniel, Vee Tull, Bob Haught, and Jimmy Graves in your thoughts and prayers as they go through difficult times. Donnie donated lots of his time as a volunteer in the county as well as being an appliance dealer for many years. Vee definitely hit the jackpot with her Madison Homes book as it is a wonderful reference for the county. You might like to go back and read Pam Nelson's profile of Vee in our May 2022 newsletter. Bob saved us when we needed an Editor for our newsletter at the last minute; he stepped in and made one happen. Jimmy gave us so much support when we decided to create the Mountain Museum at Criglersville. He was there with his ideas, labor and financial aid when we needed it most. All were long time members of the Madison County Historical Society, and we will miss them. May they rest in peace.

Thanks for your support.

Max Lacy

From the Editor....

Many thanks go out to Kathleen Hoffman who went all in to produce a comprehensive record of the two Flood of '95 programs. Her articles will be a valuable resource for future generations as they look back on the flood as a historical event.

Here are 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.
- For feedback and letters to the editor, our addresses are: madhistory467newsletter@gmail.com and PO Box 467, Madison, VA 22727.

~~~Judy Mahanes

# Membership Report

Below are listed those who became new members during the third quarter:

Tracy Tanner Bond ~ Madison, VA

Kenneth Yowell ~ Etlan, VA

Be on the lookout for your renewal letters for 2026. Just fill out the form on the back of the letter and return it along with your tax-deductible dues. Please make any necessary changes in your personal information to help us keep our records up to date. Your support of the Society is greatly appreciated.

~~~ Arlene Aylor

The Flood of 1995: Response and Memories

By

Kathleen Hoffman

When the historic flood of June 1995 hit Madison County and caused \$93 million in damages, there was a scramble to put together ways to handle it and to save both people and property. The immediate response was of necessity all Madison County, and as the late John Fray, then the Emergency Services Coordinator, put it "It was like a really good high school football team playing in the Super Bowl."

Members of the team that responded to the flood gathered at Madison County High School not long after the 30th anniversary of the flood to talk about the efforts to save people, animals and property after the water and debris swept down from the Blue Ridge Mountains and almost crushed a small section of the county around Graves Mill. People had watched their homes swept away, seen livestock head for higher ground as their fences were crushed, found roadways to anywhere gone, and scrambled for higher floors in their homes or sought out the houses of neighbors.

The 2025 event at the high school was arranged by the Madison County Historical Society and featured a panel of those who had made up the team facing their very own Super Bowl with time left for some personal reminiscences. As Lynn Graves said from the audience, it was something "I'll remember all my life."

The \$93 million in damage included \$53 million in agricultural losses, based on the estimate of Extension Agent Brad Jarvis, who is now retired but came to speak at the session. Typical of the load officials carried was the one he described. Not only did he have to collect information on losses and damage for various essential emergency declarations, but "I had to prepare press releases" for Board of Supervisors chair David Jones. He also couldn't move around the county because the roads and bridges were out, so "I had to have people who could observe report to me." The state emergency declaration had to be filed in 24 hours. It was clear, though, even before reports were in, that "Our county was broken." The Super Bowl was on.

One thing everyone agreed on was that the response was also one of citizens, who quickly volunteered when the need was made clear. Steve Utz, then the county administrator, said the immediate problem was that "we didn't know what was going on." Someone had said a house at Ruth had flooded, he said, but the worst of the disaster was in such a limited area that useful knowledge was limited to a very few people right at ground zero. "There were no cellphones then," Utz reminded the crowd. Some back roads were being closed fairly quickly, but "When VDOT (the Virginia Department of Transportation) shut down Rt. 29 we knew it was bad." State police were quickly involved, as well as emergency services from the Coast Guard, fire and rescue departments, and later the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Red Cross, and others.

State police helicopters were airborne, and officials were able to see how major the damage was, according to the then county administrator. The Coast Guard also brought helicopters. The hardest hit areas were inaccessible by road, and preliminary looks at the situation resulted in the state police representatives arriving with 200 body bags. (there was only one fatality, 64-year-old Doris Frisbie). Teams were set up to do searches, with each including EMS personnel, fire department representatives, at least one person who knew the stricken area well, and law enforcement in case of looting.



*L to R: Steve Hoffman, David Jones, Mike Hale,
Steve Utz, Nan Coppedge*

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The water plant could no longer produce drinkable water, but conservation efforts were announced, the public responded, and the water tank lasted. The animal shelter had to make provisions for pets in the hard-hit areas when they were found. People looked out for each other, and even gathered for cookouts, contributing the otherwise doomed provisions from their useless freezers.

Panelist Jones, the board chairman who was also a dairy farmer, said his farm had received flood warnings for southern Madison via a weather radio in the early morning. He then got a call from Utz, saying "we have real problems." Jones headed into town. Dairy cattle were even more of a problem than most unfenced livestock, since they needed to be milked. Trailers showed up, and Laneway Farm's cattle were evacuated to the nearby Lambs' farm, where there was electricity, to be milked.

After the few days of chaos, Jones recalled, his family went to church on Sunday, in a spot where the sun lit up the mountains. In spite of the bright picture, scars remained. "It was like a giant cat had used its claws down the side of the mountain." Now, he summed up, "Everything is so back to normal it's hard to believe." He is still, in retrospect, incredulous that there was only one fatality.

Nan Coppedge, then Director of Social Services, said she realized with a bit of a start that she was in charge of setting up shelters. Their department had had one training session on how to go about this, a calm, low-key affair with no mention of the kind of realities that happened - that the Coppedge children would be trapped at home up in a flooding area, that the rescue squad building would be taken over by rescue teams, and that the only beds that were available were cots left over from the Korean war.

Coppedge quickly realized the need for space. The county board met hurriedly with school officials, and she was given the go-ahead to commandeer the high school as a place to set up "a little city." The makeshift center was established as a spot for displaced people to try to make contact with each other, find something to eat, get health department and medical help with missing medications, and even to get up close and personal with rescue helicopters. The director quickly found that being in charge meant not only being responsible for displaced neighbors but also being asked by volunteers what they could do, keeping records because government assistance would demand them, and making provision for displaced pets. All of Madison seemed involved - soon Yoders, whose name is synonymous with food through Yoders' store, were cooking a chicken dinner for 100 on that first day, while others got out the ancient cots, and organized and distributed the donations of food, clothing, and baby formula. One hallway filled quickly with donated cleaning supplies, and the animal shelter did its best to keep up.



Jill Miller and Carol Gamble



Brad Jarvis

People did what they could. A school bus was sent to ferry kids who had been attending Camp Varsity in Aylor to the high school. They had hiked down to a nearby church where they could be picked up. Coppedge had to take the available moment to check on her children and other family members. But everyone was safe, and most of all everyone was cooperative. "Typical Madison County cooperation, and good work by the social services staff," the director concluded. She has written in greater detail about her own experiences with the flood, in an article that appeared in the May 2025 issue of the Historical Society newsletter, available online at the society's website.

How bad were things? "The dollar figure was so big I had to recheck it," Jarvis, the extension agent, said. Half of the state damage was in Madison;

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200 county houses were damaged. From a farm point of view, not only were pigs and cattle running loose but "there was no feed, no fresh water" for livestock. A state team had to come to handle animal mortality. "The Virginia Farm Bureau sent five eight-man teams to rebuild fences. We kept them for three days." The threatened White Oak dam held but later had to be repaired with careful oversight by the Soil and Water Conservation District. The FEMA people came on National Guard helicopters.

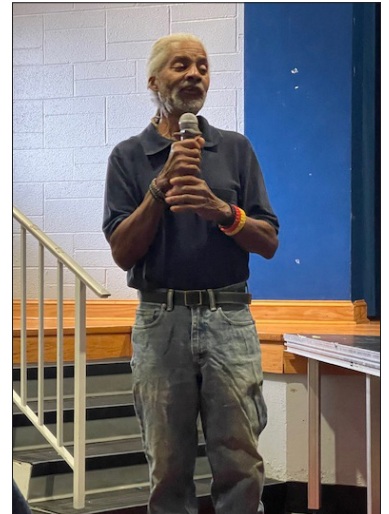
Finding himself a designated check signer for the Flood Relief Committee, Mike Hale also experienced major cooperation from all sides. "Donations started to come in immediately," he recalled, and there were contributions from churches and from the Virginia Extension Services almost instantly. The Red Cross and Piedmont United Way funds had to be negotiated, and the committee, appointed by the Board of Supervisors, was quickly dealing with \$120,000. The group continued to meet until the end of 1995, eventually disbursing more than twice the original amount of funds. Hale said there had been a Salvation Army unit in Madison, but because of the need it was really reborn. "The response of people made us proud to be Madisonians," he concluded.

And "What were the rest of us doing?" was the introduction from Steve Hoffman, one of the people who responded kind of automatically to an emergency because of his many connections to local organizations. "We had people who come when the phone rings," he said, from the sheriff's office, the rescue squad and the fire department, but organizing a unified command center made all the difference. "The most important thing in an emergency is communication," he said, and the setup was essential to declaring the various stages of an official emergency.

Carol Gamble and Jill Miller made a sort of joint appearance at the program; they were used to being a team since together they had started a trash collection business called Country Carting years before the flood. They had driven in their sizable truck to Graves Mountain Lodge that day and headed back toward Banco as the rains were coming down. Water stalled the truck, and they spent five hours in it before the Coast Guard helicopter came to airlift them out. Jill summed up the unforgettable experience in a few sentences - she was out on the running board of the truck, with helicopters beating the air above and loose tree limbs flying. Then she was airborne. "They moved me like a ballerina," she recalled. The two were set down in the McHaney yard in Criglersville, where they were taken in, warmed up and fed, Carol said. Their adventure wasn't quite over, though. When the water went down some, they waded to Banco, where they got a ride to Madison.

Khalil Hassan briefly summed up a frightening story that would have applied to others. "We had just moved to Criglersville in 1992, and didn't know a lot of people," he said. The Hassans were renting a house while theirs was being built nearby. "I was looking out at a small pine tree," he recalled, dead phone in hand, trying to gauge what was happening, when "something hit the house like a truck." Water was gushing in, and as they tried to climb up to the next floor the stairs collapsed. They got out on the roof, jumped to the ground and ran up the hill. "We spent the next seven to eight hours trying to find our way to a neighbor's house" amid rain and lightning. When they returned the next day, their house was gone, but their two cats were found safe in a tree - and the clothesline was intact.

Lynn Graves recalled that water had started coming into their shop at Graves Mountain Lodge, he said, an unmistakable sign that there was trouble. There were about 30 guests, and no one was able to get out. Employees had to stay, too. "We were a little island," with part of their bridge washed out. Rainfall measured 20 inches, they found later, compared to just a few inches up on the mountain at Big Meadows. One more remarkable thing about a remarkable day.



Khalil Hassan

COS Homecoming

The Children of the Shenandoah (COS) is an organization formed by descendants of residents displaced from the Blue Ridge Mountains during the formation of Shenandoah National Park (SNP). The group has worked with SNP officials to ensure that the story of these people is told accurately, and members meet to share family stories and seek ways to preserve the heritage and customs of the mountain people.

COS was revitalized in 2013 with the formation of the Blue Ridge Heritage Project (BRHP). The mission of this organization is to honor the families who were displaced in the eight counties where land was taken for the Park and to educate the public about what happened back "before the park." Here in Madison County, the stone chimney and nearby kiosks at Criglersville were erected as part of BRHP.

COS hosts annual Homecoming celebrations for descendants and other interested folks. In the past, these events have been held at various locations in the Shenandoah Valley. This year, however, the Mountain Museum at Criglersville hosted the event held on September 28, 2025.



Nancy Knighting



There was a big crowd with Nancy Knighting as the guest speaker. Several authors were there to sell their books and enjoy the festivities. Food was available for purchase, and Melody Corbin had cake for everyone. She did a good job of organizing the whole thing; our Society just provided the venue. Graves Mountain Farm and Lodges brought picnic tables for the event. Fifty-six people signed the Mountain Museum guest book, and there were probably others that toured the Museum without signing the book. It was really nice to have this event in Madison County, which lost more land and had more people displaced than any other county. The Society hopes COS will decide to come back to "this side of the mountains" in the future.

It's Time to Shop!

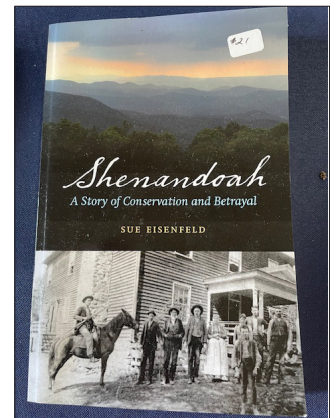
Falling leaves and cooling temperatures remind us that the gift giving season is fast approaching! We invite you to visit the Gift Shops at the Madison Museum at Kemper and the Mountain Museum at Criglersville to purchase gifts for folks on your holiday lists. Browse through notecards with a uniquely Madison flavor. Some feature watercolors painted by local artist Frances Lacy; others highlight the County's scenic vistas, flowers, and churches through the eye of photographer Pat Mingee. We also continue to offer gold Christmas ornaments in seven designs: Courthouse, Arcade, Kemper Residence, Village of Rochelle, and Piedmont, Hebron, and Chestnut Grove Churches.

The shops stock 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. *Ask for Nothing* by Maxine Weaver Crane was recently reprinted so we now have plenty of that title available. Also check out *Greater Culpeper Memories, a Pictorial History of the Early Years*.

Do not be turned off by the title; this book contains many historical photographs from Madison County.

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 shops. The maps themselves can be obtained at the Madison Library.

The Gift Shops are open during regular Museum hours. We accept checks and cash but do not process credit or debit cards. The Mountain Museum at Criglersville will close for the season after Sunday, December 14, 2025. Thursday, December 18th is the last day the Madison Museum at Kemper will be open before closing for its Winter Break.



Chrismon Trees and Their Historical Connection to Madison County

By
Pam Nelson

Chrismon Trees have long been part of Christmas celebrations in Madison County churches including Hebron Lutheran, Mt. Nebo Lutheran, Walker's Chapel and Madison Presbyterian. Chrismons are precisely made tree ornaments designed to tell the story of Christ through symbols. Traditionally, they incorporate the use of white and gold to represent purity and majesty. Used on trees to decorate churches for Advent and Christmas, many of the symbols, including a variety of different crosses, are very familiar while others may be less obvious. While a fish symbol may seem out of place on a Christmas tree, in this case it indicates a Christian meeting place. According to legend, Martin Luther was the first to bring an evergreen tree indoors to decorate with white candles for Christmas. German settlers are believed to have brought the Christmas tree tradition with them to this area.



Hebron Lutheran Church

The idea for Chrismons was first created in 1957 by Frances Kipps Spencer who wanted to create Christmas ornaments more appropriate for a church sanctuary setting. Her combination of the words "Christmas" and "monogram" became "Chrismons." A member of The Lutheran Church of Ascension in Danville, Virginia, Mrs. Spencer was the great granddaughter of a founder of Mt. Nebo Church in Madison County. She went on to write and illustrate five books with detailed ornament directions and descriptions of their meaning. While Chrismons can now be purchased, traditionally they are carefully created as a labor of love that can be passed on to future generations. Joyce Kipps, a longtime member of Mt. Nebo Church, initiated the creation of Chrismons in Madison. Created from simple supplies, including gold colored wires and beads as well as pearls and sometimes white Styrofoam, the intricate patterns can be challenging for even the most experienced crafters. Joyce is well known for carrying on the project started by her family and for her willingness to help others start their Chrismon collections. Joyce enjoyed sharing Chrismons with interdenominational groups because she believed the ornaments emphasized their similarities rather than any differences.



Editor's Note: This article is offered in thanksgiving for her contributions and in memory of Joyce Kipps who died on June 20, 2025.

Change of Constitution and By-Laws

Members will be asked to approve an adjustment to the bylaws of the Madison County Historical Society at the Society's membership meeting on November 16, 2025. According to Article X of the Constitution and By-Laws, *"Changes in this document shall be initiated by the Board of Directors.....and then be approved by the affirmative vote of the majority of the members of the Society present at any regular or special meeting of the Society provided written notice of the proposed changes has been sent to the members by the Secretary."*

The Board approved the change to Article VII, Section 2 at its meeting on October 9, 2025, and recommends approval by Society members. This article notifies members of the proposed change.

Current wording:

Article VII -Meetings

Section 2. A quorum for the Society meetings shall be 25 per cent of the membership. Written proxies will be recognized.

Proposed wording:

Article VII-Meetings

Section 2. A quorum for Society meetings shall be all of the Society members present at the meeting. Any votes taken on matters under consideration at the Society meetings must be approved by the affirmative vote of the majority of the members of the Society present.

This change aligns wording in Article VII with that in Article X and would allow Society business to be conducted in a timely and orderly manner.

Phil Brockman
Recording Secretary

Madison County Historical Society
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540-395-5119

Address Service Requested



www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org
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 Museums and on-line at <http://www.madisonvahistoricalsociety.org>. (Click "About" and scroll down the page.)

For more information about any of our activities, or to schedule a museum visit outside of normal hours, call the Society's office at 540-395-5119. Leave a message if no one answers so we may return your call.

VISIT OUR MUSEUMS

Madison Museum and the Kemper Residence

412 N Main Street

Open Tuesday, Thursday, Friday

10:00 AM to 2:00 PM

(Closed mid-December - March 1st)

Mountain Museum at Criglersville

1128 Old Blue Ridge Turnpike

Open Sunday, 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM

***Memorial chimney and kiosks
open all the time.***

Graves Mill Park

52 Bluff Mountain Road

Open all the time.

Arcade

124 N Main Street

Open by special announcement.