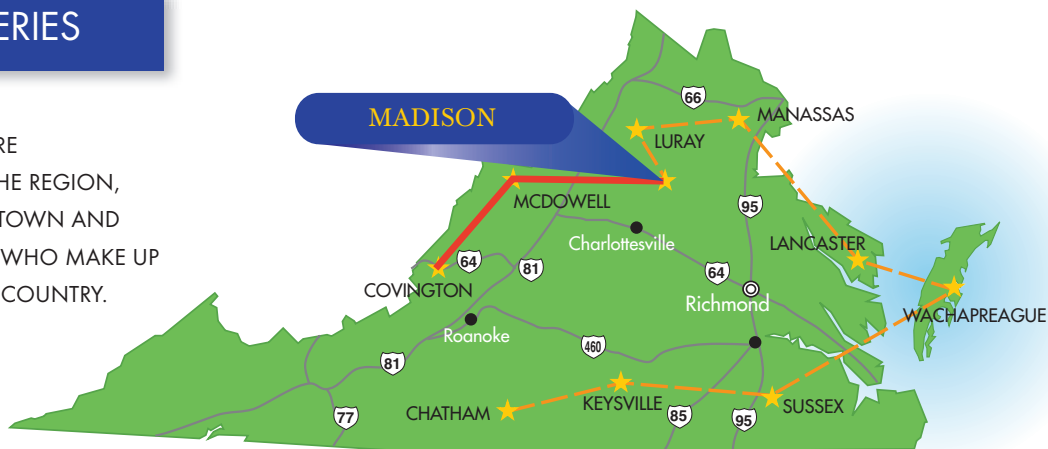


DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2008, WE'RE MAKING OUR WAY AROUND THE REGION, EACH ISSUE VISITING A SMALL TOWN AND MEETING SOME OF THE FOLKS WHO MAKE UP THE HEART OF ELECTRIC CO-OP COUNTRY. ON THIS YEAR'S THIRD STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

MADISON

BY JANE DEGEORGE, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

THIS SCENIC BLUE RIDGE ESCAPE IS A COMMUNITY WHERE FOLKS GREET STRANGERS AND A DIME CUP OF COFFEE CAN STILL BE HAD.



JANE DEGEORGE PHOTO

The Madison County Courthouse, built in 1829-'30, is a unique example of Jeffersonian architecture.

Traveling into Madison is like heading back in time. It's the type of community where people wave hello whether they recognize you or not, and a 10-cent cup of coffee isn't unheard of.

About half of the buildings that dot Main Street – the town's main drag – are more than 100 years old. The town, set in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, was founded in 1800, eight years after Madison County was formed from Culpeper County to its north.

Residents take great pride in the history of the community, which was named for James Madison, who later became the fourth president of the United States.

Madison's family owned several properties in the county at the time, including The Residence, built in 1793 for James Madison's brother, William Madison. The home was later bought and remodeled by Robert Walker, the founder of Woodberry Forest School, a private boarding school in the county.

Citizens of Madison – the county seat and the only incorporated town within the county – have worked over the years to restore deteriorating buildings and compile information about historical spots in town. Visitors equally appreciate the community's history, as it's often noted as the number-one attraction to the area, according to Madison Chamber of Commerce Director and Tourism Coordinator **Tracey Williams**.

The most prominent stop along Main Street, located at the center of town, is the Madison County Courthouse. The brick structure – built in 1829-'30 – is still in use today. The courthouse was constructed by a set of workers who had previously helped build the University of Virginia under the direction of Thomas Jefferson.

"It's a rare, if not unique, example of architecture from that time," says **Willie Lamar**, who has served as the town's mayor for eight years.

MAIN STREET REVAMP

The Greater Madison Main Street Project, a collaborative effort between the town and county first start-



AT A GLANCE...

POPULATION: 309

FOUNDED: 1800

ELEVATION: 598 ft.

LAND AREA: 0.9 mile in length and 1,300 feet in width

FACTOID: About half of the buildings in town are more than 100 years old.

JANE DEGEORGE PHOTO



DON RICHESON/ MADISON COUNTY EAGLE PHOTO



FROM TOP: Madison Town Councilman Lawrence Beasley relaxes on a bench in Beasley Park in downtown Madison. A concrete walkway and handmade archways were recently installed in the park, which was named for Beasley, a former longtime county grounds keeper. • The Madison Chamber of Commerce Visitor's Center and Madison Drug Company are among the historic buildings that line Main Street in downtown Madison. • The Kemper Residence, at 412 N. Main St., is named for James Lawson Kemper, who lived there starting in the 1860s. Kemper, a major general in the Confederate Army, was governor of Virginia from 1874-'78. The residence is open to the public for tours.

ed in 1999, has resulted in over \$1 million in grants used to replace sidewalks, repave roads and refurbish a previously nondescript park on the corner of Main and Church Streets.

"People actually notice we have a park in town now," says Williams.

The park – now home to a stamped concrete walkway and handcrafted archways – was named for Town Councilman **Lawrence Beasley**, a longtime county groundskeeper who continues to tend to areas in town on a volunteer basis.

Other grant funds were used to assist property owners with repairing the

facades of deteriorating buildings. The recently completed venture has given new life to the town's look, according to Williams.

"The whole project has given town residents a boost. Some property owners did improvements on their own as well. It's really been a collaborative effort," she said.

STORE SERVES COMMUNITY

Madison Drug Company – established on Main Street by Dr. Walker S. Jones in 1856 – was among the town's businesses that upgraded its outward appearance. The family of Mayor

Lamar now owns the drug store, one of the oldest pharmacies in the U.S. His parents, **Jim and Marjorie Lamar**, purchased the business in 1960.

The longtime pharmacy features an old-fashioned lunch counter serving fountain drinks, ice cream and sandwiches.

"We're famous for our chicken salad and egg salad sandwiches," says **Jim Lamar**. "We still use the same recipe after all these years."

Although the prices have changed over time, they've stayed reasonable, the owner adds. A dime at Madison Drug Company will get you either a glass of



JANE DEGEORGE PHOTOS



(L-R): The Lamar family (L-R): Jim Lamar, Marjorie Lamar and Madison Mayor Willie Lamar at the family's business, Madison Drug Company. • Madison County native Joan Tanner shares some photos and a laugh with her husband, Bobby Tanner, in their downtown antique shop. • Camp Hoover in the Madison County area of Shenandoah National Park, where President Herbert Hoover maintained his presidential getaway. • The view from the 3,291-foot-high summit of Old Rag Mountain is one of the area's most popular attractions. • Madison Chamber of Commerce Director and Tourism Coordinator Tracey Williams stands outside the town's visitor center on Main Street.

Coke – albeit small – or a cup of coffee.

"We had nickel Cokes until the late '70s, and then we went up to 10 cents," Lamar notes.

Nearby Piedmont Episcopal Church – built in the 1830s in an architectural style similar to the courthouse – featured an obituary for the drug store's five-cent Coke in its weekly bulletin at the time.

"It said, 'We mourn the demise of the five-cent Coke that suddenly made its departure over the weekend,'" the owner recalls with a laugh.

Right around the time the Lamar family first took over the establishment more than 40 years ago, Madison County's first volunteer rescue squad was formed. During the first three years of the squad's existence, the drug store served as a dispatch center during the weekday hours.

"It was fairly easy to get calls covered because I knew where to find people," Lamar recalls. "There were lots of squad members in and around town who were allowed to leave work to go on calls. That doesn't happen anymore."

Marjorie Lamar, one of the rescue squad's first members, continues to serve on the squad, which now has a dispatch center north of town.

TOWN REMAINS UNTOUCHED

Although the Main Street upgrades are welcomed by most, some residents resisted one recent proposed change. A 35-foot-tall hemlock tree in town – said to be infested with a type of tiny insect called the woolly adelgid – was set to be removed from Lawrence Beasley Park as part of the Main Street improvement.

A group of citizens – headed by Madison County natives **Bobby and Joan Tanner**, who own an antique shop in town – banded together to help "save the hemlock."

"As long as it's living and looking good, I don't think you ought to cut it down," Bobby Tanner says of the approximately 65-year-old tree, which stands adjacent to Tanner's Church Street property. The 72-year-old has watched the tree grow over the past 50 years from the porch of his store, called Farmers Service Center when it first opened as a feed store in the 1950s and known as The Feed Store Antiques and Collectibles ever since the owners switched gears about a decade ago.

"I remember when it was 6- or 8-feet high, it used to be what they decorated for Christmas," Tanner says.

The couple was able to raise enough money to pay for the necessary treatments for the tree, which a county volunteer then injected into the soil around it.

The "save the hemlock" campaign is a testament to why Madison has remained mostly untouched throughout the years. The county's character as an island of slow growth in a sea of development is primarily due to its residents' heartfelt attachment to the history and uniqueness of their community.

"There's been very little change here in my 72 years," Tanner says. "There's been some, but very little. Is it a good thing? I think so."

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Madison County Virginia

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND VISITOR CENTER

"Adding Value to the Community" • (540) 948-4455 • www.madison-va.com

DON RICHESON/ MADISON COUNTY EAGLE PHOTOS



JANE DEGEORGE PHOTO

IF YOU GO...

The Madison **Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center**, located in the heart of downtown Madison at 110-A N. Main St., offers an abundance of information about area attractions, including brochures, historical booklets and maps. The visitor's center is open 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday. For information, call (540) 948-4455 or visit www.madison-va.com. Madison's annual **Chamber of Commerce Business Expo** will be held this year on May 15.

The **Madison County Historical Society** has developed a self-guided walking tour of 40 town landmarks, including the **Kemper Residence** at 412 N. Main St. The residence, which is open to the public for tours, is named for James Lawson Kemper, who lived there starting in the 1860s. Kemper, a major general in the Confederate Army, was governor of Virginia from 1874-'78. Booklets that include photos and historical information about each of the buildings are available at the Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center.

E.A. Clore Sons, which has been producing furniture since 1830, is one of the oldest family-owned businesses in the U.S. Their showroom is on Clore Road (Route 637) just north of Madison.

The county's largest employer, **Plow & Hearth**, a nationwide home and garden outfitter, started as a small retail store in the county almost 30 years ago. The popular

catalog-based business operates a country store and a catalog outlet store, both on U.S. 29 south of town in Rochelle.

Prince Michel Vineyard and Winery, one of the largest wineries in the state, is located on U.S. 29 north of town in Leon, near the Culpeper County line.

Shenandoah National Park, which covers one-sixth of Madison County, is chock full of trails for walking, hiking and horseback riding. Two of the park's most popular destinations within the county are **Old Rag Mountain** — reaching 3,291 feet — and **Whiteoak Canyon Falls**. Visit www.nps.gov/shen for maps and information about these national-park destinations.

Madison County is home to a large number of bed-and-breakfasts and camping options.

Graves' Mountain Lodge, located northwest of town along **Old Blue Ridge Turnpike** (Route 670) in Syria, offers family-style meals as well as cabins, motel rooms, and camping.

Madison's annual **Taste of the Mountains** festival draws crowds of tens of thousands each year. The festival — now in its 16th year — is set for 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Aug. 30 along Main Street in town. The event has remained a tribute to the customs and traditions of the people who lived in and around the Blue Ridge Mountains in the 18th and 19th centuries, featuring food, music, crafts and living-history reenactments. ■



DON RICHESON/ MADISON COUNTY EAGLE PHOTO

Madison's annual Taste of the Mountains festival draws crowds of tens of thousands each year.

BUSTLING CENTER OF ACTIVITY

Main Street wasn't always so quiet. In the latter part of the 19th century, Madison was a popular stop along the newly constructed Blue Ridge Turnpike, which connected New Market in Shenandoah County and Gordonsville in Orange County.

The Hunton House hotel – a now-vacant three-story structure on Main Street built in 1804 – served many of those passing along this route.

During the former hotel's later years, President Herbert Hoover was among its list of regular guests. At the time, Hoover maintained his presidential getaway, then known as Rapidan Camp, along the Blue Ridge Mountains within what is now Shenandoah National Park.

President Hoover's visit to the county on Aug. 17, 1929, which attracted more than 10,000 people to the site of his speech, is commemorated annually. The event took place on an expanse of land near town, now known as Hoover Ridge.

SCENIC TREASURES

Sitting atop Courthouse Mountain, almost the entire length of town is afford-

ed views of the area's most prized feature – the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Almost 75 years ago, eight counties – including Madison – donated land along the mountain range to create Shenandoah National Park. In order to make way for the park, Madison County villages that had been in existence for hundreds of years were dismantled and families were forced out of their homes. Recently, park officials created an exhibit – on display at the Harry F. Byrd Visitor Center within the park – that tells the stories of these relocated families.

Overall, the majority of the county's acreage is covered by forest and farmland. Agriculture remains the basis of the county's economy with local farms producing beef, dairy and hogs as well as a variety of crops. A number of small wineries operate locally in addition to Prince Michel Vineyard and Winery, one of the largest wineries in the state, located in the northern end of the county.

The wood industry – production of finished lumber as well as furniture – is another important business here. Madison County has been home to Madison Wood Preservers since 1959,

and furniture-makers E.A. Clore Sons, one of the oldest family-owned businesses in the U.S., since 1830.

TOURISM BOOM

Williams has watched tourism in Madison increase in recent times. Just three years ago, the chamber of commerce's Web site averaged about 500 hits per month. Now the site is tallying more than 7,000 visits every 30 days. The tourism coordinator attributes the growth to a greater desire to travel closer to home.

"People aren't flying as much, they're driving," she explains.

Madison is situated conveniently along U.S. 29, within 100 miles of major cities, including Washington, D.C., Richmond, and Charlottesville.

The county's scenic views and friendly residents make it a perfect destination for those looking to escape, according to Williams.

"I consider Madison to be a getaway from the faster pace," she concludes. "The history and outdoor recreation, and just the peaceful, small-town atmosphere, are what attract folks." ■