

Randolph County Historical Society Newsletter



RCHS Mourns Loss of a Mainstay Donald Lee Rice

“I might as well – can’t fish!” was his well-worn playful lament.

But now Donald Lee (Don Rice) has all the time the Lord will allow in His kingdom for fishing or writing or hiking or traveling or being with family and friends – things that he loved to do.

Donald Rice passed peacefully on July 3, 2021, at the age of 92 at the Davis Medical Center in Elkins.

He was the last surviving member of the Lewis Jordan (L.J.) and Florence Nutter Rice Family.

When Don was born in Bridgeport, West Virginia, on May 26, 1929, few would have guessed that he would become the preeminent historian for the county where his ancestors had farmed and settled since before the Civil War. As the youngest son in a family of 10 children, Don grew up and went to schools in Randolph County watching and hoping to follow in the footsteps of his older brothers (Robert, Willard, Paul and James) and his sisters (Lois, Virginia, Rita and Eleanor) with their many accomplishments in academic, athletic, social and military pursuits. One younger sister, Mary, died in infancy.

Don graduated from Elkins High School in 1947; he was president of his Senior Class and was a standout football player with enough skill to go on and play collegiate football on scholarship at Davis & Elkins College. He achieved success there, both in the classroom and on the athletic field. His Political Science and Economics degree from D & E in 1951 led him to continue studies in that same subject area at West Virginia University, where he attained his master’s degree in Political Science.

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Mysteries of the Moundbuilders

Presented by Don Teter

During the centuries before Europeans settled in North America the Moundbuilders were the dominant culture across the eastern part of the continent, including what is now Randolph County, West Virginia. Speculation and myths regarding them have prevailed in the past, with many persisting today. Who were they? A mysterious now-vanished superior race? Nope. People guided by the wisdom and technology of ancient aliens? Nope. Intelligent Native Americans with an understanding of geometry and rudimentary engineering concepts? Yep.

For the fall RCHS program, Don Teter will present a brief overview of the Moundbuilders’ cultures and their accomplishments, based on historic and archeological research rather than speculative legends and sensationalist television “history”. Join us Tuesday evening, November 16 at 6:30 on zoom or facebook live. The annual meeting will start at 6:15 on zoom.

See Facebook Randolph County Historical Society or randolphhistoricalwv.org

Remembering Don Rice

President's Letter by Don Teter

If my Uncle Don Rice doesn't deserve to have most of an issue of the Randolph County Historical Society newsletter devoted to him, no one ever will. Our feature article is excerpted from his obituary, ably authored by his son Tom, and I did not see much room to improve on it. For decades Uncle Don was the face and voice most often thought of when you mentioned this Society. He was a long-time officer of RCHS and tireless volunteer at our Museum, and as a friend of history, as evidenced in the tributes posted by other historians after his passing.

As those historians rooted in the local area noted, Don Rice's reputation extended well-beyond the borders of this county.

Editor Stan Bumgardner said in the Fall 2021 issue of *Goldenseal* magazine (published by the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture and History) Don was "a prolific writer of books and articles and the sage of all-things Randolph County.

A few years ago Uncle Don and I went to the West Virginia Humanities Council's Charleston headquarters for a lecture about the United States Army in World War I. Don gave the speaker copies of several letters that had been written by his Uncle Austin Rice while serving during and just after that conflict. In our conversations that evening Mark Payne, the late director of the Humanities Council's *History Alive!* program, described Don Rice as "Mr. Randolph County History."

My personal memories of Don include times when we both bagged does at the Rice-Teter "Tin Camp" in Canaan Valley and the time I got one and he didn't at cousin Suzi's in Upshur County. Aunts Carolyn and Rita were chatting in the kitchen nearby and never heard my shot, but Don did from hundreds of yards away and figured I had gotten one, and seemed just as pleased as if he had done it himself. Carolyn was not always thrilled when Don brought a deer home, but she generally tolerated it well. If you want a chuckle, ask my brother Greg about Don's Trout Place doe.

I recall a time camping on Laurel Fork and encountering Don returning from a day of fishing. He had caught several fine Brown trout and said he could only get them to hit minnows. Luckily, I had that bait, and the next day I was able to nearly match his catch.

I have numerous memories about Don and the Historical Society, including my satisfaction that the last summer he spent his weekends sitting in the Museum he didn't have sweat dripping from his nose, since we had gotten the building equipped with a modern heating and cooling system. I think he was a bit amazed by that. And one last memory from the Museum – over thirty years ago when Don was President of the Society a program by Buhl Shahan was attended by Norman Wamsley, himself a local history enthusiast and generous early supporter of the Museum, who was there to keep Mr. Shahan straight on a few matters of theology. Mr. Wamsley had just turned 95, and Don asked if he had any advice on how to reach that age. Norman shakily eased himself up from his seat, gazed around the room and said "be careful." It may seem silly, but I found some wisdom in it and have tried to take it to heart. Most of the times I got hurt over the years surveying in the woods it was about half a second after thinking "You shouldn't step there." As I have aged, I've tried to heed Norman's advice and not step there.

Uncle Don followed that advice well enough to nearly equal Norman's 95 years, and perhaps the two of them are now somewhere discussing or debating Randolph County history.



"Don Rice was a lion in the history community. I cannot say enough about his friendship and mentoring he gave so many of us young historians studying County and regional history. He was always available to give us advice, provide valuable information, and help us understand the relationships of historical figures and events in area history. His books helped me build the basis of my ever expanding knowledge of Elkins and Randolph County history. Without his help I doubt I would have written my book on the history of Elkins. I will miss his smile, warm welcome, jovial and wicked sense of humor, and ability to call on him to help me understand or find some aspect of county history. He was a font of information and a great friend and mentor. I will miss him so much. May he rest easy in knowing he helped mentor so many of us professional historians and many history buffs in the state."

Rob Whetsell

DONALD LEE RICE

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“Don Rice was a treasure. His contributions to Randolph County history and education are beyond measure. His influence stretched beyond our borders as well, with pioneering work of national significance. Don was a mentor to historians and genealogists, always generous with his time and knowledge, and his gift of humor. His passion for history shaped my life, but his eyes glowed brightest when discussing our mutual love of the outdoors and the pursuit of trout! He was a friend, a gentleman, and an educator without peer.”

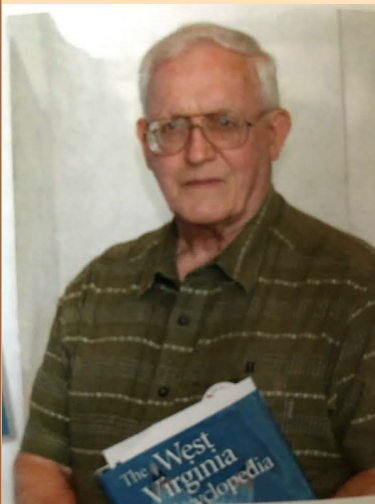
Hunter Lesser

“If you weren’t into history after hearing Don talk about it, you weren’t ever going to be.”

Stan Baumgarder, Goldenseal

“Don was the leading Randolph County historian whose passion for local history was unmatched. He spent countless hours researching and sharing his wonderful picture collections and knowledge. He was my inspiration to learn more, and I learned much from him. He was an educator and icon. He will be greatly missed and it is a sad loss for our community.”

Bill Wehr



Don began his long career in public education as a teacher at Durbin School in Pocahontas County and Elkins High School, and served as principal of Harman School. He retired in 1987 as Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Randolph County, following many years of service as an administrator in the county school system. He held advanced certificates in education, which allowed him to do a variety of jobs in teaching and education administration. He also retired from the West Virginia Army National Guard, with over 20 years of service, of which nine years were full-time active service. He rose to the rank of Master Sergeant (MSG), but was officially retired at the rank of Sergeant First Class (SFC).

Don was an 80-year member of First United Methodist Church in Elkins.

Don had three real loves in his life – his family, the study of local history and exploring the out-of-doors. He was married to his wife of 68 years, Carolyn Canfield Rice, who survives him. His wife’s Canfield ancestors settled parts of the lower Shavers Fork area in Randolph County. Hit outdoor pursuits were always combined with a study of the history of a given area, so their marriage further fueled his interest in the outdoors and early Randolph County history.

His favorite fishing grounds were Shavers Fork of the Cheat River and Glady Fork and Laurel Fork, east of Elkins. He held firm to the idea that there is no better meal to be had than “trout, ramps and fried potatoes” and jokingly regarded trout as the “only fish worthy of the chase.” He fished for trout during his travels around the country, from Virginia to Alaska, in states like Pennsylvania, Maine, South Dakota and Wyoming. He especially enjoyed his backpacking trips into the Wind River Range of Wyoming, where he caught “more fish than he ever knew existed.” He loved exploring Alaska and once had occasion to cross north of the Arctic Circle with his son, Tom, and grandson, Keith. He finally realized a long-held dream of having a log cabin on Glady Fork River on land that adjoined his cherished Monongahela National Forest. He spent as much time there as he could in recent years during trout fishing and deer hunting seasons.

Don and Carolyn had three children, all living and married, with children – Lynne Petrosky (m. Phil) of Buckhannon, West Virginia, Tom Rice (m. Melissa), of Xenia, Ohio, and Donna McClung (m. Ben) of Sissonville, West Virginia.

They had many nieces and nephews who were very special to Don. A total of 8 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren live and work in various states and will carry on the traditions and legacy he established with his love of history and the out-of-doors.

Don published a number of books on the history of the region, including *Randolph 200: A Bicentennial History of Randolph County, West Virginia, and Elkins Centennial Album*. He authored several articles for *The West Virginia Encyclopedia* and West Virginia’s *Goldenseal* magazine. He wrote or contributed information for many articles in local newspapers and magazines. His early interest in military history focused mostly on Civil War activity around Randolph County. Later writings reflect an expanded interest in World Wars I and II, with special emphasis on people from the local area who rose to prominence during those wars.

Since the 1950s, he was involved in the Randolph County Historical Society. He was President of the Society for close to 25 years and held other offices on county and state boards and committees related to the preservation of state and local history. He was the driving force and primary volunteer behind the establishment of the Randolph County Historical Society Museum at the historic Blackman-Bosworth store in Beverly, West Virginia. That effort started in the mid to late ‘70s and continued into his later years. The volunteer hours are incalculable. No one ever loved his hometown, his state, and its history more than Donald Rice did.

Don’s funeral was at the Lohr & Barb Funeral Home of Elkins on July 10, with interment following at the Elkins Memorial Gardens on Country Club Road. The family asked that memorial gifts be made to the Randolph County Historical Society Museum.



AmeriCorps Member sought for RCHS. Paid service position helping with museum, exhibits and collections. See www.afnha.org for details.

MUSEUM PROGRESS

“If These Walls Could Talk” is a new exhibit launched in the Randolph County Museum in the summer of 2021 about the story of the Blackman-Bosworth Store Building, home of the Museum. Plan to come see this exhibit when the Museum reopens for summer of 2022.

Roof repair on the historic Blackman-Bosworth Store building—the Randolph County Museum—was completed in August. This two-stage process involved replacing the more than 100 year old metal roof with a modern metal look-alike material in 2020, by Cardemone Historical. This summer, the flat roof on the north side of the building was replaced by Reliable Roofing. These repairs have stopped some persistent roof leaks that were of concern for damaging the building and the collections inside it.

Both projects were funded in part by West Virginia Development Grants from the State Historic Preservation Office of the WV Department of Arts, Culture and History. Match funds for the grants came from donations to RCHS, including support from Randolph County Commission.

COVID Recovery Act grant from West Virginia Humanities Council will help RCHS and the Museum recover and move forward from the pandemic. This new grant will help expand digitization of collections to make the museum more available to a variety of audiences.

2021 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

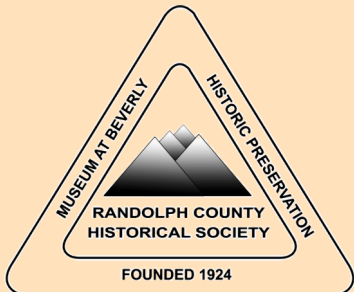
Join us Tuesday, November 16 at 6:15 for our Annual Membership meeting. We will hold elections for Board seats, and all 2021 AND 2022 members are eligible to vote. We’ll also hear a short update on Society progress over the past year. Zoom link will be posted at www.randolphhistoricalwv.org and in Randolph County History Facebook group. The Moundbuilders program will also be streamed Facebook live on Randolph County Historical Society page.

Randolph County Historical Society

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Membership 2022 Pay your dues now to count for 2022!

Annual Dues:

___ \$20 Regular ___ \$50 Supporting ___ \$10 Hardship

Donation: \$ _____ Amount Donation Purpose:

___ Don Rice Memorial Fund for Museum Improvements

___ Capital Improvement Fund

___ Where Needed Most

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Make Checks to Randolph County Historical Society
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To pay online go to www.randolphhistoricalwv.org