George McDuffie Blake
1859-1944
-An Almost Native Son-

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George McDuffie Blake, 1859-1944

–An Almost Native Son–

Contributed by

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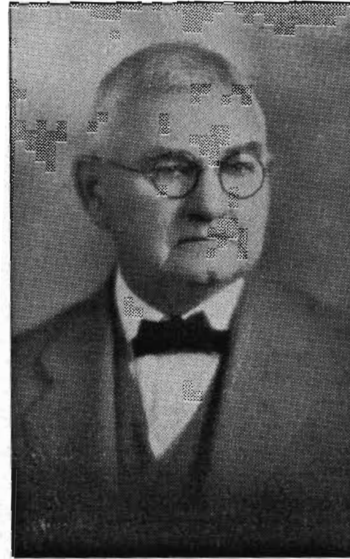
He may not have been a native son, for his Virginia roots never reached deep into the red clay and mineral-rich soil of Louisa County. And his descendents, by not living in the County, were unable to keep fresh the memory and contributions of one of Louisa's most outstanding and warmly regarded citizens: George McDuffie Blake.



George McDuffie Blake.

His Louisa County roles spanned, with some interruptions, nearly half a century. They ranged from general storekeeper, farmer, Angora goat rancher, postmaster, real estate broker, insurance underwriter, justice of the peace, owner-editor-publisher of the County weekly *The Central Virginian* to "His Honor, the Mayor". Most remarkably, the last three roles were not assumed until he was past 65 years of age.

Even with little association with his name, his Louisa endeavors – such as the newspaper and the town government – continue to flourish. Institutional memory would never be able to replace the light in the eyes and tone of voice of those left to say, "Ah, yes, Mr. Blake, I remember him well" as they evoke a glimpse of a white-haired elderly gentleman, tall and robust, whose genial manner and blue eyes presented a personality as reassuring as his gnarled hickory walking stick. For nearly a quarter century, primarily between the two World Wars, this man – born before the War Between the States – was as much a Louisa Court House landmark as the Confederate statue in Court House Square.

Though born and raised in the Tidewater and a resident, first of Baltimore, later of Richmond, he never met a "you are not one of us" attitude. George McD. Blake's useful years of service to his adopted county (Green Springs, Trevilians and the town of Louisa) were symbolically – even poignantly – recognized when stores and offices closed their doors at the noon time hour of his funeral on May 2, 1944. The town of Louisa had come to a standstill and claimed him as its own. He was 85 years of age.[1]

The crowded service was conducted by the Rev. A. Campbell Tucker at St. James Episcopal Church, adjoining the Blakes' two acres of meadow, orchard and garden, where they lived modestly in a little white frame house for nearly a quarter of a century. Louisa's regard was best expressed by Bruce V. Boxley, his successor as editor-owner of The *Central Virginian* when he once wrote that Mr. Blake brought people together "in closer communion."[2] He fostered that "communion" by providing the comfortable feeling one gets (or remembers) when visiting an old-time country store, with its pot-bellied stove, where friends meet and exchange news of family and friends, births and deaths, illnesses and accidents and trips. He did it not only with his affable manner, but through his varied and interesting editorials and by the columns from his *Central Virginian* correspondents from every hamlet and crossroads – from Apple Grove to Zion's Crossroads.

His friendly knack of bringing people together through *The Central Virginian* while meeting their needs – in this case, for news and information – was not surprising. For he had been doing exactly that by fulfilling customer needs for bodily sustenance (i.e. groceries) with his own general stores for nearly 40 years, starting in his teens in Baltimore. His parents, John Henry and Ally Lumpkin Blake, with three sons moved there in 1870 from Mathews County, Virginia on the Piankatank River to join his successful merchant uncle, Robert Garrett Lumpkin. Born at Cobb's Creek, February 10, 1859, he was eleven years of age. Before leaving Mathews, his father had served as a part-time Methodist lay preacher, farmer and storekeeper and briefly as a member of the Virginia General Assembly. George's brother, John Dallas Blake, became a distinguished Baltimore physician; another, Eugene, became a Methodist minister, settling in Southwest Virginia.[3]

But Louisa's future leading citizen, the personable George, preferred a career serving and interacting with people in the retail business of food and household goods. He did so well that, at age 22, his Baltimore store owner, Cornelius V. Kenny, sent him to Richmond circa 1881 to manage a similar store. He never returned to Baltimore, save for visits, probably because his choice of lodging captivated him with its stimulating atmosphere – that is, compared to his straight-laced Methodist parents' home. Also, it changed his life.

Luckily, he chose the commodious Richmond home at 506 North Sixth Street of Baltimore-born, Episcopalian Susannah Snow Booth Walters, who added to the exchequer, after the death of her husband, by taking in a few paying guests.[4] Also living there, her larqe extended family that included writers, teachers, a musician and physician. (In 1880, according to the U.S. Census, 15 persons, including children and domestic helpers, resided there.)

It was a choice that led to marrying Mrs. Walter's youngest daughter but also may have opened the path to Louisa – even though 17 years were to pass before he put his foot onto that path. He had become a friend and admirer of Mrs. Walters' "star boarder", one of the Commonwealth's most colorful and controversial characters: a man from Louisa, *The Richmond Whig's* fiery Editor and Secretary of the Commonwealth, Colonel William Cecil Elam.[5] Twenty-three years his senior, Elam may have become his role model, even though handsome "Mac", as some called Blake, may not have matched Elam in bravura. But by the end of his life, George had nearly rivaled him in achievement, versatility and charisma. Elam certainly introduced him to the confusing hurly-burly of Virginia politics. He only had to point to his own jaw that the previous year , on June 6, 1880, had received a duelist's bullet. It was fired by Colonel Thomas Smith, son of an ex-Governor, whom Elam had criticized editorially.[6]

Elam's "second" in the duel, 34-year-old James Booth Walters, *Whig* News Editor and Mrs. Walter's only son,[7] brought his bleeding Editor home for his family to tend until his wife, Drusilla Poindexter Elam, arrived from Louisa. No stranger to bullet wounds, she first laid eyes on him sixteen years earlier, soon after he was wounded in one of the Civil War's fiercest calvary battles.[8] It took place on June 11-12, 1864 at Trevilians when 5,000 Confederate soldiers repulsed 7,000 of Sheridan's men, trying to break General Lee's supply rail line from the Shenandoah Valley. She nursed him back to health at her nearby family home, (later to be known as "Keewhiffle") and soon they were married, with North Carolinian Elam becoming a Louisian to the core. Ever grateful to Louisa, he carried a Louisa news column in the *Whig,* the feisty organ of the Readjuster Party. After the *Whig's* demise in late 1885, Elam used Louisa as his base, briefly representing the County in the General Assembly, but primarily he edited several newspapers, notably the *The Norfolk Virginian Pilot.*[9]

Three years later, on March 26, 1884, the gifted young newsman, James Walters, died leaving a grief-stricken family, in particular his heart-broken 23-year-old sister, diminutive Emma Thornton Walters. She and George, now 25, had been keeping company, but delayed their marriage until January 16, 1885, at the end of her mourning period. For the young couple, the next 10 years were eventful and stressful. Three children were born, Emily in 1887, and two sons who died in infancy. George opened two businesses at separate locations, one handling wood and coal, the other at 539-541 North Second Street, selling food and household supplies. He rose fast in the Richmond business and political community, becoming active in the Retail Businessmen's Association, fraternal organizations and State Democratic affairs. In 1895, he was elected to the Richmond Board of Aldermen (City Council). He was a founder of the Richmond Riding

and Driving Club and at one time he owned a purebred pacing horse "Prince Belmont".[10]

Then suddenly, in 1896, George McDuffie Blake made one of the inexplicable decisions that was to characterize his life. In what some persons might have considered a judgment-clouding burst of enthusiasm, he summarily exchanged his substantial urban life for an uncertain but more bucolic one in Louisa County – a Piedmont county about sixty miles away named for the daughter of King George II. He sold the stores, left his organizational posts and took his loyal wife, enthusiastic eight-year-old daughter, several dogs and a black cat, "Epaminondas Pelopidas" (named for a Greek general) and a canary bird called "Pete" off to Louisa's Green Springs on the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad. There they lived next to the depot in a house, rented from Asa Dunkum, with an adjoining store and began store-keeping and farming.[11]

Years later his still-puzzled daughter, Emily, said that she loved the country but was always aggravated that "Papa had a way of making changes whenever things were going well."[12] One explanation could have been the need for new challenges or, in this case, he might have been laying a base for future political office, especially if he had a powerful local sponsor. Politics was in his blood – what with his father's 1853 Mathews County representation in the Virginia General Assembly and his mother's people, Lumpkins, Roanes, Wyatts and Garretts of King and Queen County being politically active in Revolutionary times.[13]

Unknown, any previous connection with this beautiful rolling section of the county, graced with manor houses and redolent with memories of Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and George Washington – except that Colonel Elam lived not far away. Indeed, Elam may have been the needed political sponsor, being a veteran of service to the Commonwealth and, thus, knew the ins and outs. Also he had changed parties, from Readjuster to becoming a Democrat, like George.[14] For it seems more than a coincidence that George next rented a 712-acre farm, "Rural Valley", adjoining Elam's land across Hickory Creek. He planned to raise Angora goats in partnership with a New York lawyer whose name is now lost to history. The farm, replete with house and barn, was leased from William C. Barret and his sister, Mary Barret Taliaferro, for five years at $45 a year, beginning in 1899.[15]

But the very next year, in 1900, Elam died at "Keewhiffle". The Angora goat undertaking did not work out. Emma's health was poor and spirits low. She was still grieving for her lost babies and for her capable mother, Susannah, who died in 1898. Also they were facing the need for better schooling for Emily, now age 13. So it was back to Richmond and the grocery business! (It was the right

move. Emily did well, graduating from Richmond High School in 1905 and later attending Randolph-Macon and Richmond Woman's College.) Their last child, Virginia, was born in 1902, only to die ten months later.[16]

George McD. Blake, however, was not done with Louisa. The challenge was there! He began juggling two careers, Richmond storekeeper and the buying and selling of Louisa property. In 1906 he was on his way to becoming a country squire, with purchase from H.R. Pollard, Jr. of a handsome 1840 Georgian manor house, "The Elms" at Trevilians.[17] He and his family lived there part-time until 1911, when he sold the house and 37 1/2 acres to Professor John F. Blackwell of Norfolk (later principal of Mineral High School) for the then princely sum of $4,750. A store and residence were maintained in Richmond while he owned "The Elms".[18] (He traveled back and forth on the C & O.)

During this period Emily met a young Richmonder, Emmett D. Cottrell, a summer vacationer at "Corduroy", the neighboring farm later owned by W. Worth Smith, Jr., who was to be George's future Louisa Court House neighbor. Their courtship was fostered by horseback riding, which was to be a life-long avocation. They married in Richmond in 1913, then lived with the Blakes, who had moved to 421 West Grace Street, until soon after their daughter, Ann (the author of this article), was born.[19]

Wearying of his successful store at 00 Broad Street, George sold the business in 1917 and found a novel way to get back to Louisa. He joined the staff of the Clerk of the United States House of Representatives in Washington and, shortly thereafter, obtained an appointment as Postmaster at Meltons – a tiny C & O rail-side community near Trevilians.[20] It was named for lumber baron Elisha Melton, who, in 1850, built the connecting line from Louisa to Gordonsville of the Central Valley Railway, later bought by the C & O.

Along with the Post Office, he ran a general store, as was customary in small places. It still stands in shabby abandonment on Route 33. His mind, however, was on land-acquisition, buying about 100 acres and house from J.D. Peronti across the tracks from the Post Office.[21] But by 1920, political reshuffling lost Blake the postmastership.

Undaunted, 61-year-old George was determined to make a life for himself in Louisa; this time at the county seat about ten miles east. Incorporated 47 years earlier (in 1873), Louisa Court House, a community of only 250 people, was a Mecca for thousands of farmers and tradespeople on March and December Court Days. In 1905 close to 10,000 people were said to be present for the dedication of the courthouse, the Confederate statue and a reunion of Confederate veterans.[22] The county's once-tobacco-based economy had slowed down and the pyrites-copper-sulphur mining boom at Mineral had died out, but lumbering and

saw mills continued to provide the steadiest single source of income. George was confident that there was a good living in real estate and as an underwriter for the Royal Insurance Co. specializing in insurance against fire, which had almost destroyed the town in 1888.[23] Though he never seemed to have made or saved much money, he had made many influential friends, such as former Commonwealth's Attorney Lindsay Gordon, Game Commissioner Carl Nolting, Judge Frederick Sims and prominent attorney John Q. Rhodes. For $1,500 he and Emma bought a small white house[24] next to the Episcopal Church in the neighborhood of the town's leading families such as the Bruce V. Boxleys and their four sons, the Phil (Clerk of the Court) Porters and the lumberyard J.S. Purcells. They lived on what is now called West Street, named for school superintendent Frank West whose house faced theirs. A non-segregated street, several of their neighbors were African-American, including "Aunt Vick", for whom Mr. Porter built a home after years of service to his family.

The Blakes' house – once a small private school[25] – lacked such amenities as electricity, central heating, indoor plumbing. (Electricity came to Louisa in 1925,[26] but they continued with their kerosene lamps.) They relied on a large garden, small orchard (winesaps), chickens and eggs. Butter and other perishables were kept in the well in an oaken bucket. Having no car or horse and buggy, they walked everywhere they needed to go. Fortunately the church where Emma taught Sunday School was only on the other side of the garden gate. The church door was never locked but the Vestry took no chances – so Emma kept the Communion wine at home in the closet with her grand-daughter's toys!

Accepting these inconveniences, they lived an idyllic life, perhaps realizing that their habit of constant moving was at an end. His idea of relaxation was to sit in his favorite rocking chair, smoking his corn-cob pipe, looking across the churchyard at Ellisville Road and watching the world go by. *He was home!* He became a picture of permanence, as if he had lived there always. Within four years, he was so well regarded that on April 29, 1924, he was sworn in as Justice of the Peace by Circuit Judge Alexander T. Browning.[27] As a result, he was often addressed as "Judge Blake". He carried out the usual magisterial duties of swearing law enforcement officers, issuing arrest warrants, performing marriages, acting as coroner, certifying signatures on contracts, serving on a three-man lunacy commission for $3 per case and, most importantly, he could conduct hearings to remand suspects over to the Grand Jury. One such was reported in *The Central Virginian:*

> *"Stonewall Jackson was tried by Justice Blake*
> *on Saturday and sent to the Grand Jury for*

violation of the Prohibition Law." [28]

Becoming the Justice of the Peace was only the beginning, for the same year the definitive moment of his life arrived unexpectedly at age 65. He bought the County weekly newspaper, *The Central Virginian,* from a failing corporation with a top-heavy staff of seven persons. It was established in 1912 as the successor to *The Louisa Enterprise* which was started in 1903. Louisa's first newspaper dated to 1870's.[29] Whether by chance or design, this purchase brought together the significant elements of his life: an opportunity to meet human needs, other than by groceries, and a chance to work for social and political change. In short, George McDuffie Blake at last had found himself.

Instinctively, he knew just what to do. Rather than having a costly and troublesome printing press, he jobbed out the news material – much of it handwritten – to a Gordonsville printer. Circulation, he knew, was the key to obtaining advertisers. In 1927, he enlisted school children in a contest, offering a $50 prize to buy books for their school library if they lined up 100 new subscriptions.[30] He cut the subscription price from $1.50 to $1.00. Within two years of purchasing the newspaper he had secured so much advertising that the paper jumped from eight to sixteen pages.[31] Virtually alone, except for one Girl Friday, he wrote the general news and editorials as well as selling the advertising. His office was in the heart of Louisa's "communication center". He shared the second floor with the "number please" ladies of the telephone exchange, right above the Post Office.

Ever-supportive Emma, at age 63, working from home, became chief reporter for the "Louisa News" column, ringing up friends and neighbors on a hand-cranked phone at their residence for items of interest. Their home and office telephones were two of Louisa's 177 telephones.[32] News also came to her through visitors and observations. She only had to look out the window to report:

> *"We were glad to see Mrs. Douglas Chaney in town today after being confined by the severe winter to her home."*[33]

These few words spoke volumes for many of her readers. Mrs. Chaney was one of the town's most colorful characters. A lady of undetermined years, she was unforgettable, with her bright auburn hair, driving a black surrey with a fringe on the top drawn by a handsome black mare, named Nancy, with a little African-American boy dangling his legs off the back. Very well educated, with

ties of kinship to the distinguished Jerdone family,[34] the widowed Mrs. Chaney lived in a Gothic mansion called "Glen-Marye", off the Ellisville road. When Louisa was known as a summer resort, she often took in summer boarders. Emma also faithfully recorded the annual arrival and departure on horseback of Mrs. Chaney's brother, Professor Glanville Terrill, of the University of Kentucky at distant Lexington.

With very little overhead costs, *The Central Virginian* virtually wrote itself, with newsy reports from its loquacious women correspondents – probably unpaid, save for a Christmas box of candy – from Apple Grove, Bell's Cross Roads, Bibb's Store, Byrd Mill, Buckner, Bumpass, Cuckoo, Dabneys, Elk Creek, Ellisville, Frederick's Hall, Gordonsville, Green Springs, Hollins Store, Johnston's Store, Kent's Store, Locust Creek, Mineral, Perkinsville, Quail, Shelfar, Thelma, Trevilians, Vawters Store, Vigor, Yanceyville, Zion's Cross Roads, and even from the big cities of Richmond and New York.

They sent in news of accidents, hospitalizations, births, weddings, deaths, visitors, plays, church and school socials and trips, and also of crops, gardens, horses, chickens, cows and pigs. To lighten the usual fare, occasionally a correspondent, like the breezy scribe from Frederick's Hall, would take a sly swipe at an unpopular symbol of authority:

> *"Mr. E.A. Christian of Cuckoo, the delinquent tax collector, was in the neighborhood the other day riding a lame horse."*[35]

But to be helpful, she ran free lost and found items, such as:

> *"Three months old white barrow shoat got out of pen. Just had her one day. If anyone sees her, notify Sarah H. Thurston."*[36]

But "Frederick's Hall" was probably surpassed by "Bell's Cross Roads", who broke the disturbing news that just before the 1930 Thanksgiving, Justice Buck's fine 30-pound gobbler mysteriously had been lifted off his roost – never to return. Also, she let her readers in on the news that "Mr. Norman Roberts and his girl friend have made up at last after a long separation." And that L.V. Rogers gave a donkey party, but no one except Miss Chaplin of Mineral succeeded in pinning the tail on the donkey "where it belongs".[37] "Apple Grove" and "Cuckoo" were often given to describing the weather and nature with the latter eloquently describing the coming of Spring, "with little frogs making music

in the meadow and the robins arriving today."[38] "Dabneys", "Buckner" and "Richmond" often held forth on health and education issues and were not bashful in chastising Editor Blake for sexism for writing on May 27, 1937 that "the State Legislature is no place for a lady".[39] Their wrath had descended because of his editorial response to a reader's suggestion that Mrs. Robert N. Harris of Elk Creek should run for the State Legislature. Later he tried to explain – but to no avail – that a lady should not be exposed to the Legislators' frequent bad language and spitting.

(A couple of years earlier he had turned down suggestions that he run for the Legislature, but he said after years of observation, he was "onto the tricks of those boys when they get down to Richmond.")[40]

Unfortunately the names of his numerous Louisa correspondents have gone unrecorded. His two regular columnists, "Aunt Patsy" and Grac Adams Davis of New York, couldn't have been more different. Aunt Patsy, the wife of tax commissioner R.E. Trice and mother of Blake's secretary, Bernice, filled her column with benign poems and homilies and gave some mild Ann Landers-type advice.

In dazzling contrast was Mrs. Davis' "Broadcasting" column with her exciting accounts of Manhattan highlife – parties, concerts, lectures. She seemed to have attended them all and in the company of lords, ladies and tycoons. Grac, who dropped the "e" from Grace, was born in 1870 in Canada, where her father was a mining engineer, later going with him to Mexico for silver mining. Some years later he was to transform part of Louisa County as Manager of the famed pyrites and sulphur mines at a place given the name Mineral. Energetic young Grace grew up there and in 1898 even bought the Mineral Hotel and wrote social notes for the family-owned *Mineral Weekly Progress.* Throughout a colorful life she held Mineral close to her heart, even, in 1934, presenting the town with a playing field. By the time she started writing for Editor Blake, circa 1930, she was twice widowed and had moved into New York's Wellington Hotel near Central Park. She became its hostess/social director where she mingled with many of those celebrities of whom she wrote. She gave up the column in 1940 and died at the Wellington in 1958. Her ashes are buried in Mineral where there is a small monument in her memory.[41,42]

Editor Blake divided his editorials between local, state and national issues. He always gave whole-hearted support to efforts to provide summer vacations for New York slum children. Sponsored by *The New York Herald Tribune,* the program was spear-headed locally by E.S. Hansen, a robust Danish-born feed dealer who himself always welcomed a number of children at his farm.[43] Also, Editor Blake drummed up support for the Episcopal Church mission to the poor and deprived of then impoverished Greene County.[44] And he was always

upfront in supporting the need for higher teacher pay. But he was in his element writing stinging editorials, on state and national issues – fiesty enough to make Col. Elam proud. He threw his weight behind New York's Catholic Governor Al Smith, running in 1928 against the GOP's Herbert Hoover. On the controversial issue of Smith's Catholicism, Blake wrote:

> *"All I ask is to put prejudice aside and do unto others as you would have them do unto you."*[45]

In Louisa, Smith lost with 735 votes against Hoover's 773.[46]

High on Blake's enemies list was the Anti-Saloon League's virtual mouthpiece, Methodist Bishop's James Cannon, who was fighting any attempts to repeal the Volstead (Prohibition) Act. But soon Blake targeted Senators Carter Glass and Harry Flood Byrd for turning their backs on Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal social programs. Because Senator Glass favored bankers in a central banking bill, Blake characterized him as "a whip cracker for the money lords."[47] Of junior Senator Byrd's opposition to Roosevelt's relief programs, he wrote that "we are quite sure that the esteemed Senator had never been on a bread line or else he would see things in a different light."[48]

One of his biggest moments was a ten minute chat on July 9, 1931 with FDR, then Governor of New York, who was passing through Louisa with Blake's old friend, Virginia Governor John Garland Pollard.[49] But his lowest moment came one day in 1935 when, – according to Louisa lawyer John Gilmer, then a school boy – President Roosevelt's motorcade sped swiftly through Louisa, not noticing Blake standing there with his sign, "Mayor of Louisa".[50] But his ardor for Roosevelt never diminished.

When not holding forth on politics, Editor Blake in the Louisa News column would maintain the folksy touch, even guaranteeing a tasty dessert for himself:

> *"Mr. John Harlow visited the office today and promised to bring us a two-pound sweet potato. We await his coming as we are very fond of sweet potato pie."*[51]

Nor was he above flattering an advertiser:

> *"All of those looking for high class chickens should read the advertisement in this paper of Mrs. J.F. Estes."*[52]

His love of the land, probably one reason for settling in the country, often shone through in his editorials. He threw his support to *The Richmond Times Dispatch* columnist Thomas Lomax Hunter's crusade against needless cutting of trees.[53] Blake was so enthusiastic about trees that in 1907 he had been elected Regent of the Richmond's Shockoe Chapter of the Woodmen of the World.[54] This fraternal organization emphasizing right living and high morality, used trees as a symbol of strength.

Blake's enthusiasm in 1926 for the proposed Shenandoah National Park knew no bounds and prompted him to exort his readers to:

> *"Get in love with the soil and everything will blossom and you will become intoxicated with the fragrance of real country life."*[55]

He never ceased praising the virtues of town, county and state and kept people's spirits bouyed as Depression years approached. He loved to regale visitors about the County's mineral riches, always forecasting a revival of gold mining. He campaigned for a place for Jack Jouett in the country's pantheon of heroes for his 40-mile midnight ride from Cuckoo to Monticello to warn Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry that the British were coming. And the eighteenth century Boswell's Tavern, near Trevilians, he insisted, was a national treasure. Because of his devotion to the area, it was only natural on January 16, 1930 that the Louisa town council looked to him for leadership when the Mayor died. All of them were unaware that being Editor, Justice of the Peace and Mayor could appear as a conflict of interest! When he was sworn in, he was the last of the Louisa Mayors to take the archaic anti-dueling oath.[56] Main Street parking regulations, according to Council Minutes, were of greater interest than duels. The Mayor was given responsiblity of warning those parked over two hours, with repeat violations bringing a one dollar fine.[57] He enjoyed the unpaid post – especially the ceremonial duties – to such a degree that he ran and was re-elected four times. His campaigning was low key. In 1935, for example, it consisted of a front page statement of the May 30, 1935 issue of *The Central Virginian* reporting on the town's improved streets and health of its citizens as well as complimenting Council members. Casting aside rhetoric, his bid for re-election was brief and to the point:

> *"I promise to do all in my power to make our*

town a better place in which to live."

Voters responded by unanimously re-electing him and the Council. During most of his eight year tenure the Council was composed of Dr. H.S. Daniel, J.M. Bailey, Russell Crank, Hunter Pendleton Porter, C.E. Hester, John R. Maddox, Miss Rosa Woodward with Porter Wright as Clerk.[58]

Mayor Blake, the Council and fellow citizens managed to weather the Great Depression, despite such calamities as the failure of the First National Bank. They were well aware of the New Deal's efforts to help unemployed young men by the presence of two nearby CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camps. Belt-tightening was the order of the day.[59]

As the years advanced, probably few people realized that the white-haired, two hundred pound six-footer – never seen without his black bow tie and gold watch chain stretched across his vest – was walking a bit more slowly as he passed Mr. Sargeant's Hardware Store, Woolfolk's Department Store, and Mr. Clark's pharmacy. But he noticed. As usual, he was quick on making a decision. Thus, on August 9, 1938, six months before his eightieth birthday, he surprised the Council with the following letter:

> *"Owing to the fact that the duties of Mayor of our town require the services of a younger and more active man, I hereby tender my resignation to become effective by September 1, 1938 or August 15."*

He continued to boost "our town" in every way. But having seen the 1920's jazz-age-bootlegger era merge into the economically troubled 1930's, and facing the 40's, Editor Blake now wrote of the war clouds gathering. He reminded his readers that he had lived through three wars: Civil, Spanish-American and World War I. Nevertheless, he bucked isolationist sentiment, backing Roosevelt against Hitler. He was especially indignant over the treatment of the Jews. Like everyone else, he didn't know what lay ahead for the country or Louisa. But for himself, he doubted his strength to continue putting out a newspaper. Nevertheless, few persons were ready for his surprise announcement on February 15, 1940, five days after his 81st birthday, that he was stepping down as Editor and Publisher. He had sold *The Central Virginian* to a neighbor and a "wide awake young businessman, born and reared in Louisa, Bruce V. Boxley". He wrote:

> *"I ask for Mr. Boxley the support and kindly*

friendship so generously bestowed upon me during my tenure as editor and publisher for the last 16 years."

GEO. McD. BLAKE

(Unknowingly, he had set a yet un-matched record for length of service for any past or future Owner-Editor-Publisher. Boxley was to fall one year short of Blake's sixteen year record.)

His loyal correspondents seemed heart-broken as they bestowed accolades upon him. The Buckner correspondent wrote:

> *"A dark shadow was cast over the last issue with our beloved Mr. Blake leaving as Editor. A warm welcome to Mr. Boxley . . . Mr. Blake started me on this, so if my ignorance gets you in trouble, just blame him."*[60]

The Richmond reporter lamented:

> *"Dear Folks, Woe is me, Woe is me. And mebbe woe is us. All I can think of is that our Editor has gone and sold us out. God bless him. I guess he is tired after so many years."*[61]

Perhaps the finest compliment of all came from the Cuckoo correspondent:

> *"We always admired his tolerance in printing things sometimes, which we knew were entirely opposite to his own personal views."*[62]

He and faithful Emma sold their little white house to caring young neighbors, Mary and Gerald Purcell and moved to Richmond to live with daughter Emily – but only for two years. For there was a curtain call. They returned to their beloved Louisa and took an apartment at the hotel, now named for Louisa's Patrick Henry. In a final challenging burst of energy, he reached out to where his Louisa life had started 48 years earlier: the Green Springs. There, he assembled 1,250 acres of blue grass and standing timber and made one of the largest land transactions in Louisa's recent history – so newsworthy that Bruce Boxley ran

the story and Blake's picture on page one of the May 20, 1943 *Central Virginian.*

But his stout heart was weakening – no more strolls down Main Street. Dr. Daniel came twice daily. Lying ill, George may have reflected on the meaning of his life. He may have realized his failure to store up worldly goods was due to his preoccupation with new challenges and meeting deadlines! But, hopefully, he knew that – like his physician and clergyman brothers – he had served his fellow man in his own distinctive way.

On May 1, 1944, at age 85, this almost native son, "Judge", Editor-Publisher and His Honor the Mayor, George McDuffie Blake, died – just exactly where he wanted to be: Louisa.

1. Associated Press. *Richmond Times-Dispatch,* May 2, 1944.
2. *The Central Virginian,* March 7, 1940.
3. Family records.
4. Richmond City Directory 1882.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Louisa County Historical Society Magazine,* Volume 25, No. 1, pp. 48, 49.
7. Christian, Asbury, *Richmond: Her Past and Present,* Richmond: Jenkins (1912), pp. 366-67; *The Central Virginian,* March 31, 1938.
8. *Louisa County Historical Society Magazine,* Volume 24, No. 2, pp. 78-79.
9. *Louisa County Historical Society Magazine,* Volume 25, No. 1, pp. 88-90.
10. Family records.
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Ann Cottrell and her grandfather George McDuffie Blake.