

## Going to the Mad Stone

By Jackie Layne Partin

The challenge to write a “short” story, a really “short” story, fell upon me. I accepted the challenge. First, let me start by inserting an excerpt from a “long, long” story that I wrote years ago called “The First Chronicles of Pigeon.” Delores (Byers) Dykes, one of my neighbors on Pigeon Springs Road, shared her story with me. The mad stone was a part of the Cumberland Mountain folklore shared mostly by word of mouth, so for future generations, I will record some accounts of going to “the mad stone.” Mrs. Dykes account follows:

*“...It was on the back porch of their home in the little valley where Delores was bitten by a puppy whose mother was rabid. Her father killed the pup then took his daughter to ‘the mad stone.’ Her mother had been ill for some time after baby Don was born and could not go with her, but her father was very attentive. Being so young, Delores could not remember where they went or who took them. The person with the mad stone stuck it to the wound and it stayed put. When it fell off, the stone was placed in milk, which turned green. This was done over and over until the stone would no longer stick. Delores has vivid memories of the milk turning green and of the small stone. Her father told her that he too, at one time, had been taken to the mad stone. He also told his family about an O’Neal girl who had been mauled by a rapid dog; she was taken to the mad stone, but failure to cover all her many wounds with the stone resulted in her death. According to Delores, folks knew where the mad stone was and went to it just like they would go to a hospital. The stone was believed to have come from the head of a whitetail deer. This was not the only remedy believed to thwart rabies before the shots were readily available to all. Don’t ballyhoo too loudly – Delores says that she is living proof that the mad stone worked...”*

In Grundy County’s local newspaper, *Mrs. Grundy*, March 1, 1917, we read “**Bit By Mad Dog**—a son of Mr. J. C. Henley was bitten by a mad dog Sunday and was taken to a mad stone at Manchester for treatment Monday. At present the boy is alright and will be up in a few days.” From this little article, one might assume that mad stones were rare. One also might assume that it was important to know where the mad stone was and who owned it. One might also assume that the stone got its name from a “mad” or rabid animal. The challenge was to know who kept a mad stone and how quickly one could get to the stone.

On **June 2, 1858** in *The Republican Banner*, we read this following account: A “Mad Stone” – *The Mount Pleasant (Ky) Journal* publishes a letter from a person, of whom it says, “He is a reliable man, and his statement is entitled to full credence,” giving an account of his being cured of hydrophobia by a “mad Stone.” He says: *On the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> of March last I was attacked by a rabid cat. It sprang upon me with all the ferocity of a tiger, biting me on*

*both ankles, taking a piece entirely out of my left ankle, clothing, flesh and all. I saw at once my hopeless condition, for the glaring eyes of the cat told that it was in a fit of hydrophobia!*

*Himself and wife travel in search of a man with a "mad stone."*

*We reached his residence the eighth day after I was bitten. For three days before we got there I felt the terrible disease coming on; had a high fever; my eyes were red and swollen, with rumbling sounds in my head; found it difficult to swallow any liquid; my left leg turned spotted as a leopard (!) twitching of the nerves; drank no water for eight days. The stone was promptly applied to the wounds. It stuck fast as a leech until it was gorged with poison, when it fell off voluntarily. It was then cleansed with sweet mild and salt and water, and was applied again, and so on for seven rounds, drawing hard each time, when it refused to take hold any more. The bad symptoms then left me, and the cure was complete, and I returned to my family and friends with a heart overflowing with thanksgiving and praise to God for his goodness and mercy in thus snatching me from the very jaws of death. Great is the power of the "mad stone," ...*

*A month later in the Bellefonte, Ala. Era we read of this account: "Capt. Isaac Clark, his son, S. P. Clark, and a grandson five or six years old, all of Jackson county, were bitten by a mad dog, as was supposed, on the 1<sup>st</sup> inst. A number of dogs, three horses, and perhaps some stock, were bitten. Mr. Clark went to a mad-stone in the possession of the widow of Charles A. Jones, near Bridgeport. After two hours's application the stone was filled with what was supposed to be the virus. Several applications were made, but the effect was not sufficient to insure a cure, and Mr. S. P. Clark started to Mississippi, in search of a madstone, that had been tried with success."*

*In the Republican, issue **Apr. 18, 1872**, "Dreadful Case of Hydrophobia, Louisville – On the 13th of February Jewett Butterfield, a policeman in Portland, a suburb of this city, was bitten on the thumb by a strange greyhound, which gave no sign of rabies. The wound healed and the circumstance was forgotten. Tuesday last Butterfield felt a pain in the arm as if punctured by a hundred needles. This was followed by chills which culminated in convulsions. The latter occurred at intervals of a quarter to half an hour, increasing in the intervals till the paroxysms became horrible. A mad stone was applied without effect, and the unfortunate man died this afternoon in the agonies of hydrophobia."*

*In The Daily American, **June 18, 1883**, another mad stone account was published in The Smithville Index: Not long since, a little boy of Walker Moore's living near Smithville, was bitten by a mad dog. Mr. Moore immediately took the boy to a "mad stone" in Coffee county, and we learn through the virtue in the stone the poison was all taken out. Mr. Moore says when the stone was first applied, it stuck to the place bitten 1 ¼ hours, and a less time each application, until it would not stick at all. We also learn that Mr. Mont Pirtle, living in the same*

*neighborhood, has a little boy which was bitten about one week ago, but his father did not know it until a day or two ago, when he immediately started with him to the "mad stone."*

These accounts will help the reader understand that "going to the mad stone," could be comparable today to going to a specialist, one who hopefully would have the real answer to the medical problem. It was not a game, but a serious, last ditch effort to save a life. This past summer one of my sons was bitten by a bat, a visit to an ER room being the immediate reaction. Please believe that had I been living in "the olden days," my family and I would have been seen "going to the mad stone."

**Note:** To keep my story short, I will allow the reader the honor of researching where the mad stone originated. Find me at [jackiepartin@blomand.net](mailto:jackiepartin@blomand.net) .