

# *Brentsville Neighbors*

Information About Brentsville

Shared Among Neighbors

October 2005

Welcome Neighbor!

Many of you know that Nelson Keys and I have been actively involved in the collection of pictures and information pertaining to Brentsville for several years. This includes the people, places and things (both old and new) that collectively make up Brentsville as we know it today. Until now the information has been assembled in notebooks awaiting an opportunity for a better method of sharing.

Now we have recently learned that the Friends of the Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre Education Committee (consisting of Committee Chair Pamela Sackett, Robin Meyering, Ron Turner and Laura Wyatt) has decided to discontinue a printed newsletter in favor of information being published on the organization's web site. Whether this serves the best interests of that organization and its members remains to be seen.

This is mentioned only because it is important for you to understand that this document **is not in any way** associated with the Friends organization. Membership in that organization has no direct or indirect relationship to this effort. There is no subscription cost requested from our audience. It is strictly a means to allow us to stay in touch with our Brentsville Neighbors and to provide a venue to share information about our town among ourselves.

We plan to focus on a specific subject—maybe historical, maybe not—and include one or more pictures of interest. We also plan to include a small section to reflect on our past. We hope you are pleased with our efforts. We will likely make mistakes but they will be our own and we will try to correct them as we know the correct information. Let us know your thoughts -- they will help guide us in this new adventure.

Best regards,  
Morgan Breeden

This month: The Brentsville One Room School - some history, memories and pictures.

## Mrs. Helen (Newland) Hammond Remembers Teaching at the Brentsville one room school

Going back to think of happenings I wish I had kept a diary. Tried to write this in story form starting in 1940 and 1941. I was interviewed by Supt. Haydon in Manassas for a teaching job paying \$60.00 a month. I was accepted for Brentsville grade school that following September. For a twenty-year-old this was a very new experience.

First, I tried to line up materials to teach five grades and second I needed to meet the needs of children and parents.

As time went along the learning and doing proved to be interesting. Of course, I needed to be teacher, janitor, nurse and superintendent!! A supervisor from Manassas came to check on my plans and to make suggestions from time to time.

There were little problems besides teaching. Children would have some fist fights on the way to school. I supplied them with small boxing gloves and that helped. The idea of having games or extra equipment was not in

the budget that's for sure. I arranged for Cookie Wolfe – a 5<sup>th</sup> grader – to come across the road and for a small fee start a fire in the Woodland stove which helped to have some heat as students arrived.

There were interesting incidents throughout the year. A hard snow fall came during the winter and someone from my home had to rescue me. Our Christmas program was presented from the Brentsville Union Church with a sheet put up for the stage curtains. Later that year an Army group from Quantico staged some practice on our grounds for World War II. We were

asked to participate in the spring music festival at BDHS – which involved some practice and high stepping in costumes. Other interesting events occurred which many of you may recall.

After the school year ended I went to Washington. World War II was starting and I applied to help with the 1940 census.



**Note: The above information was provided by Mrs. Hammond in her own words to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Brentsville School which was held in the school on September 13, 2003.**

Note: The following information was researched and prepared by Nelson Keys on May 17, 2000. He is a former student of the Brentsville One Room School. This document provides general information on the public shools in Brentsville. We know there were also a number of private schools (or academies) in operation at various times. We will report more on them in a later issue.

### **Brentsville School Teachers Throughout the Years**

The first known Schoolhouse in Brentsville was a one room building close to the Hatcher Memorial Baptist Church at the corner of Bristoe and Hooe Streets. This Church was built in 1847. The Brentsville School was known as Brentsville District School #1 from 1871 – 1944. The first teacher was P.G. Slaughter; he was paid \$50 a month.

Mr. R.H. Stewart, August 1880.

Mr. W.T. Woodyard, 1886.

Miss Ida Nicol, 1887, remained at Brentsville for several years.

Miss Ella Garth was the next teacher and in 1908 was over worked and an assistant was hired. Miss Garth was paid \$30 a month and her assistant was paid \$25 a month.

In 1893 the Brentsville Courthouse was no longer needed because the County Seat was moved to Manassas along with the Courthouse. Then the Brentsville Courthouse became the Prince William Academy, a private school until 1905. In September of 1907, it was offered to the Brentsville District School Board for use as a public school. The sale price was \$800 but the matter was tabled and no further action was taken for two years. Then in 1910, the Board re-opened negotiations to purchase the old Courthouse and two acres of surrounding land. An agreement was reached with Dr. W.J. Bell to buy the building, the land and all slates, desks and other equipment for \$900. The plan was to remodel it into a two-room school.

When the remodeling plans were submitted to the State Board of education, however, they were rejected because the first floor ceiling in the old Courthouse was too low. Plans were redrawn and on July 13, 1912, the Board agreed to architect I.A. Cannon's plan to remodel the Courthouse by removing the upper floor and putting in a false ceiling, higher than the original one but eliminating the second floor. The lower floor would then be divided into the two rooms the School Board felt were necessary. The Board agreed to pay \$900 for both the old Courthouse and the two acres. In August of that summer, the

Board agreed also to erect a solid board fence between the Courthouse, now the Schoolhouse, and the old jail building. In 1919, the Board agreed to appropriate \$150 for a metal ceiling and to recruit citizens to do the work.

Two teachers continued to handle grades 1-7 at the Brentsville School. In 1921 a group of citizens petitioned the School Board for a high school and the Board did hire a third teacher to provide high school subjects for the students who desired them. From 1923 to 1925, Mr. George W. Beahm, a well known educator who had most recently taught at the Woodlawn School, was principal teacher at Brentsville.

The first white schoolhouse at Brentsville was moved in 1914 for a cost of \$15, to the newly acquired site for the Brentsville Colored School. It served the black children of the community for another four years.

The rest of the faculty during that time consisted of Miss Shields and Miss Naomi C. Pearson. Miss Pearson stayed on at Brentsville after Mr. Beahm left and filed the 1925-26 year-end report. Then in 1926, Anne Ross Keys came from Greenwich to teach reading, writing, arithmetic and geography to the lower grades. She was twenty-two years old, a high school graduate in her first year of teaching.

In 1928, the District Board agreed to build a new schoolhouse to serve the white children of Brentsville. The Courthouse by that time was over one hundred years old and in need of replacement. The new High School in Nokesville had been built and the older Brentsville students were bused there. A smaller building would suffice.

The new building was a one-room school with a white weatherboard exterior and five large sash windows, as well as a door across the front to let in light. The floors were narrow tongue-and-groove maple and the ceiling was made of pressed tin.

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Hanging lamps provided light on dark days and black-boards lined two walls. Coats, lunch pails and the wash bucket were kept in the cloakroom by the front door. The gable roof was metal covered. The new teacher was Lucy Mae Motley. A Miss Helen Hendrickson was a teacher in Brentsville as late as 1929. The next teacher was Miss Dorothy Woodhouse, through the school year of 1939. Miss Mary Buckley through April 1941.

From Superintendent of Schools Richard Haydon's report at the end of the 1933-34 school year, we know that the enrollment at the Brentsville School stood at thirty-nine with an average daily attendance of ten less than that. There were twenty-three promotions that year, eight failures and eight drop-outs. The next fall, thirty pupils were enrolled and an average of nearly twenty-nine attended on a daily basis. At that time first through fifth grades were housed at Brentsville. The sixth graders were bused to the Woodlawn School. The seventh grade students went to Nokesville. The seating capacity of the schoolhouse was forty-five but attendance during its lifetime generally ranged from twenty to thirty pupils.

Until 1941, first through fifth grades were taught at the Brentsville School. That year, only grades 1 – 4 were housed there. The teacher was Miss Mary Senseny, who had attended Cannon Branch, Bennett Elementary and Manassas District before going off to college to earn her teaching degree. She returned to Prince William County to begin a long career as a teacher and Brentsville was her first assignment. She was paid \$80 per month that first

year and \$85 the second year. From that salary, Mary paid Mr. and Mrs. Seymour \$25 a month for room and board during the week. She went home to Manassas on weekends. The Seymour's also boarded two children in their house and the teacher and pupils walked a mile each way to school. On really bad days, Mrs. Seymour drove them.

By the 1940s, people had become more aware of the importance of sanitation. Each child in Mary's classroom had his or her own cup for drinking just as each had his own clean basin of water in which to wash hands before lunch. Water came from the school's own well via a pump in the front yard. Mary had to sweep the schoolroom floor herself but Mr. James (Cookie) Wolfe made the fire in the coal stove every morning in the winter.

After her marriage, Mary, now Mrs. Kline, lived in Manassas and drove to Brentsville to teach each day. As is the case with most teachers, she found the second year easier. There was only one fifth grader that next year so he was allowed to go to Nokesville. The next year, Mary went to teach at Nokesville Elementary School and later moved to Baldwin Elementary in Manassas for a teaching career which covered more than twenty-five years.

The Brentsville School remained open for another two years under the tutelage of Mrs. Wilma Tomlinson and then, at the end of the 1943-44 school year, the school closed and the children were bused to Nokesville and Manassas.



**Congratulations and Happy 100th Birthday to Ms. Verona (Counts) (Bean) Craig  
Brentsville's Oldest Student!  
October 27, 1905 -- October 27, 2005**



***The following information is provided by Nelson Keys in his own words. Nelson was born in Brentsville. This article reflects on his early memories of Brentsville and attending school here.***

My name is Nelson Joseph Keys, I was born February 16, 1926, to Joseph Clarence (Joe) and Ora Nettie (Heflin) Keys at 12404 Bristow road, Brentsville, Virginia at 1:A.M. with 4 inches of snow on the ground. I was delivered by Doctor Stewart McBride of Manassas, Va., and he stayed all night because of the roads. Most of the roads back then were dirt and gravel, but mostly dirt and full of ruts.

I had four brothers and two sisters. I was the first one born in our home in Brentsville, Va. My oldest brother and my oldest sister were born in Marshall, Va., because that is where our parents were living at that time. My oldest brother, Alfred Madison Keys was born October 21, 1922, and died a few months later on July 13, 1923 and was buried in Middleburg, Va., in the town cemetery. My oldest sister, Mary Louise Keys was born December 24, 1924. My younger brother, Raymond Stewart Keys, was born April 16, 1927, in Brentsville, and my youngest brother, Douglas Gilbert Keys, was born May 25, 1929. My baby sister, Virginia Amelia Keys, was born April 4, 1932, in Brentsville also. Our home in Brentsville was a four room house with two rooms upstairs and two rooms down with a porch across the front on a one acre lot and a fence around it. There was no bath room, no electricity and no running water, but we did have a very good spring down in back of our barn and most of the homes down in our part of town got their water from that spring. It was named Fennigan Spring. Most of the houses were built like ours back in the early years.

My first remembrance, I was in our back yard riding our tricycle, we also had a little red wagon, this had to be about age three. I really remember when my uncle gave me a black doll baby for Christmas, but he gave my oldest sister, Louise, a white doll baby, and this really upset me. I never did get over this. Later in the year, about summer time, my father was operating a steam engine and pulling a flat steel drag. He was dragging

the county roads. He stopped at the end of Brentsville and Bristow Roads and came over to our house for a drink of water and to see how we were. Another time when I was about age four, our distant cousin, a Miss Nellie Keys, who kept house for our great Uncle Mifflin (Miff) Keys and lived across the dirt road from us came over and took my sister Louise, my brother Raymond and myself down the old road to Manassas, Va. The road started between our grandparents and Rucker Cooksey's properties and went down to Broad Run. On the way we passed Mr. Lute Black's home. Then at the run we turned right and went about two or three hundred yards to a swinging bridge, which we went across and back. That was a real experience

for us kids. The automobiles had to turn left just before the bridge and ford the run and on the other side was the start of Lucasville Road. Lucasville Road ended at route 234. The old road to Manassas started at John T. Keys and Rucker's properties that are now Bert Snouffer and Jim Shoemaker's, at Shoemaker's Garage in Brentsville.

Next I remember my mother took me to school my very first day in our old Model-T Ford car, and I was only five years old. We went up hill all the way, but had to turn right to enter the driveway, full of ruts and up hill to the schoolhouse. The car had only two forward gears and to change you had to stomp on the pedal in the middle of the floorboard and up the hill we went. And that was my first day of school. The schoolhouse had only five big windows across the front and a door to enter and exit. There was a small room in the rear that we used for our coats, overshoes, lunch bags, and a table for our water bucket and pencil sharpener. Also, we kept all the school equipment and sports equipment and everything else that the school needed was stored in it. There was a piano in front of the fifth grade desks, where two coal oil lamps sit for use at night, PTA meetings and etc. There was a

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wood and coal stove in about the middle of the room and towards the rear, and when the weather got cool or colder, one of the boys, James (Cookie) Wolfe, who lived across the road from the schoolhouse, would come over and build a fire in the stove to heat the one room school and have it warm when we got there. One of the big boys would get the water for us from the well. He would put the water on the table and put a dipper in for everyone to drink out of. We got our water down near Bristow Road where an old big well was dug, probably when the Courthouse was build in 1820. Back when we went to school, there was a concrete slab ten or twelve feet square and about twelve inches or more thick, with a hole in the middle for an iron hand pump. This is where we got our water then.

We had recess in the morning and evening and when the recess was over, the teacher or one of the students would ring a hand held bell for us to come back in for more schooling. Our teacher was a Miss Dorothy Woodhouse and she boarded with two or three different families, but mostly with Mr. and Mrs. John C. Seymour that lived about one mile from our school and down Brentsville Road. The teacher walked to and from school every day except when the weather was bad. Then Mrs. Laura Seymour would bring the teacher in her car.

We played all kinds of games, skipping rope, marbles, ring around the roses, London Bridges falling down, here we go around the mulberry bush, Jack rocks, or jumping jacks, then baseball, and what a diamond we had! The home plate was on level ground in back of and between the schoolhouse and the old Courthouse. More

about the courthouse in a minute. Here we go around the ball diamond, from home plate to first base was down hill and in back of the base was the boys toilet and behind it was a board fence and the boards were standing upright and side by side to form a private fence from the toilet to a walk that went from the courthouse and the jailhouse. At this time the jail was owned by Mr. and Mrs. John Petty. The court in Manassas had ordered the fence be put up like this. Now back to our ball diamond, from first base to second was down hill, and up hill from second to third and behind third base was the girls toilet, and next to that was the woodshed. From third to home plate was level. From the pitching box was up hill and if the catcher missed the ball, sometime it would roll all the way to the ditch at Bristow Road. Now for the out field, between first and second the outfield went up hill, with a few cedar trees, honeysuckle, briers, and weeds. Then from second to center field was down hill but only grass and weeds. From center field to left field was a slight up grade, but more weeds, honeysuckle and briers. Now back to the boys toilet. Next to it was a henhouse, then a couple more buildings and then a cow and horse barn. And then a barbwire fence all the way around the ball diamond, by the woodshed and the schoolhouse and down to Bristow Road.

All of my brothers and sisters went to school there in the one room school house. My teacher through the third grade was Miss Woodhouse, then a Miss Mary Buckley taught me through the fourth and fifth grades. Man, what a time I had getting through those five grades.





## Students attending the 77th School Reunion September 10, 2005



**(L-R) Nelson Keys, Franklin Cornwell, Fredrick Whetzel, Casper Whetzel, Louise Bell, George Melvin, Catherine Corner, Edith Turner, Faye Samsky, Douglas Keys, Nancy Shely, Joyce Smith and Gladys Eanes. They are holding a quilt made by Edith Turner that reflects her memories of Brentsville including the Donovan Farm (where she grew up), the Brentsville Courthouse and School and doilies crocheted by her grandmother.**

### ***“Reflections”***

*A look back at the people, places and events of Brentsville.*

#### **HEAT LAMP CAUSES DESTRUCTION**

On the night of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Feb. at the home of Mr. & Mrs. W.R. Stephens, the shed where Bobby Stephens kept his livestock caught on fire and burnt to the ground. The cause was reported to be a red heat lamp with which he was keeping his pigs warm. A sow and eight pigs absolutely refused to leave and were burnt to death in the fire. The Mother would not desert her young ones. Two calves, two hogs and a goat were rescued in the nick of time by Mr. Stephens, Mr. Diaz, and Mr. Croushorn. The pigs were born about 1 PM Thurs. afternoon and the fire occurred between 9:30 and 10 the same day. Just before the fire engines (2) came there was an explosion caused by the infra-red heat lamp.

(Source: The Weekly Star, FIRST EDITION, February 7, 1955)

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Information About Brentsville  
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