

# Brentsville Neighbors



Information About Brentsville  
Shared Among Neighbors

August 2006



Welcome Neighbors,

We sure hope you had an opportunity to see the History Channel production on our little Union Church. It was made even more special by having the opportunity to watch them film the various sequences last October. They worked for three days to get about 15 minutes on the air. Of course, there was a lot of work in creating the special graphics that we didn't see in advance but the combination of what we saw during the filming and what we saw during the airing made this a very special event for Brentsville.

And speaking of special events, another one has just taken place. The home that Harry Visger built right next to the Union Church was for sale again and the county has purchased it to be the new Brentsville Visitor's Center! Some modifications will be necessary but the initial plans are to use it for offices, a gift shop, a museum and to have space available as changing rooms for those who wish to use the Union Church for their wedding. The back deck will also be expanded to provide a covered reception area. It will allow parking closer to the buildings and provide modern bathroom facilities for our visitors. Believe it or not, this is an excellent example of spending money to save money. To accomplish the same, very necessary tasks in the jail or another structure would have cost the county many times the

amount of this simple purchase. We are featuring the house in this issue. Pictures provided by Harry are also in this edition.

For those of you who remember the Paul Ratliff family, August was a special month for them as well. They moved to Brentsville in August 1958; left in August 1967; and their youngest child, Rennis Paul, was born in Brentsville on August 15, 1960. Watch for the Ratliff Family story next month.

Nelson and Morgan.



## This month:

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## Featured Brentsville Building

### The Harry Visger Home

This home, located at 12229 Bristow Road in Brentsville, was built by Harry Visger in 1953. Currently it is described as a 1-1/2 story home with partial stone front with five rooms, including three bedrooms, one half bathroom and two full bathrooms which combine to provide 2,386 square feet of finished living space.

During July, 2006, Prince William County purchased the property from Digna Robles. The property will be used as a visitor center and museum while providing office space for the Brentsville Site staff as well as changing facilities for those who may use the Union Church next door. There will also be an expanded, covered deck on the rear to facilitate receptions.

Digna Robles obtained the property from Richard and Sandra Flynn on March 25, 2005 (DB2497/1123). Sandra and her first husband, Jackson, purchased the property from Frank and Carla Rector on June 27, 1970 (DB320/125). During January, 1984, Sandra took sole possession of the home (DB1249/0380) and later married Richard Flynn. The property was then made a joint ownership between Sandra and Richard on October 27, 1997 (DB2497/1123).

Frank and Carla Rector obtained the home from Harry and Angie Lee Visger on May 27, 1964 (DB320/125). Harry had purchased the property (a part of a larger tract) from his in-laws, Bennie and Ethel Breeden on November

5, 1952 (DB164/428), and the following year built his home there. Here, Harry and Angie Lee lived with their family until it became necessary for them to move to Florida where they cared for Angie Lee's parents.

Benny and Ethel obtained this property (and more) from Marion Templeman Van Horn on April 18, 1942 (DB108/384). It appears Mr. Van Horn was in the process of buying the land from Ollie L. Carr (DB82/427) and transferred ownership to the Breeden's who paid off the balance due. Ollie L. Carr purchased the property on November 11, 1926 from T.E. Didlake and Robert A. Hutchinson (DB82/427) trustees for the estate of Archie L. Holsinger and Alice B. Holsinger (DB73/328-331). Alice received the property from Nannie B. Keller on July 1, 1916 (DB68/272). Nannie Keller received the land from her husband, H.J. Keller on March 11, 1915 (DB66/224).

Prior to this time there were a number of owners involved and the land was frequently referred to as the "Hotkin" lot. It was owned during the 1860's by James Purcell. A family cemetery is on the property with matching stones for "James Purcell, died Jan. 29, 1867, Aged 65 years" and "Catharine A. Purcell, Died August 28, 1869, Aged 70 years." There are brown fieldstones also present which implies additional graves not marked with a name.

#### August 8, 1843 Jury for trial of Commonwealth vs Renoe

John Appleby, William Cogan, Thomas Warring, James Purcell, Wileman Thomas, William Colbert, Daniel Larkin, Edward Hall, George T. Adams, John Riley, Manassa Russell, Elijah Ricketts

*Source: Clerk's Loose Papers, Volume III, Copyright 2004 Ronald Ray Turner*

# The House Harry Visger Built



Family of William Henry Breeden: (standing L-R) David Fredrick Breeden, William Alexander Breeden, Joseph Luther Breeden, Nicholas Hensley (married to daughter, Francis), Daniel Westley Breeden, James Monroe Breeden. (seated L-R) Francis Janette (Breeden) Hensley, (holding her daughter) Nellie Hensley, Elizabeth Emaline Ann Rachael (Hensley) Breeden, Carlton Jessie Breeden, William Henry Breeden and Charles Edward Breeden.



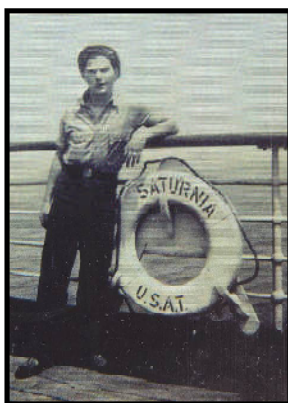
## Pictures from Harry Visger



Angie Lee Breeden



Ethel Irene (Burke) Breeden & Benjamin Jackson Breeden



Elmer Daniel Breeden, a member of the Merchant Marines



Ethel Vivian Breeden



Hazel Stephens



The Willing Helpers Club: (standing L-R) Minnie Counts, Hazel Stephens, Ethel Breeden, Lila Landis, Angie Visger (front L-R) Billie Burke, Fern Slusher, and Helen Slusher

## Where WILD things live..



Common Mullein  
*Verbascum thapsus*



Oscar Carter



Grady Shoemaker

# DeLancey Webster

## Childhood Memories of Brentsville

### 1940's and 1950's (Part 2)

(Last month, DeLancey was just wishing that Christmas would come sooner... )

**CHRISTMAS** - Speaking of Christmas ... one annual highlight was our trek with my brother, sister and father into the woods behind the house to find our Christmas Tree. We would drag it back (often in the snow) and then decorate it with homemade ornaments ... such as decorated old used flashbulbs, and chains made of paper rings. And no matter how scrawny or misshapen it may have been, it was a thing of beauty to us because it came from our own land. The other annual Christmas highlight was that on that special morning after Santa's visit I would come downstairs to find that my older brother Gill and my Father had, late on Christmas Eve, set up the **LIONEL ELECTRIC TRAIN SET**. They brought down from its hidden storage place in the attic the large green painted board on which tracks were nailed, and the train, and trees and houses, and more. I had the use of the train from Christmas day until early in January, when it went back into storage until next year.

I remember that my mother wrote a remarkable column for the Journal Messenger newspaper, and I am supplying copies to the Brentsville historical society, for they capture the spirit of our village during the post war years more effectively than anything I have seen. [See Brentsville Historical Files, and "Brentsville Bound," a collection of writing and artwork by Agnes Webster.]

**BURMA** - In 1952-3, my father took our family to Burma for a year – his work involved helping the new Burmese government set up a film industry. During that year, the family home was rented out. I spent the 6<sup>th</sup> grade at the Methodist English School in Rangoon, Burma, but returned to BDHS for the sixth grade. Somehow, the world of Brentsville occurred smaller once I'd flown on 2 and 4-prop airplanes around the world, sailed on junks in the Indian Ocean, visited the Taj Mahal and the Acropolis, stood on a overlook observing the stark poverty and misery of a Palestinian refugee camp, fed

pigeons in St. Mark's Square in Venice, ogled the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, and crossed the English Channel in rough weather. Nonetheless, Brentsville was still home.



**THE WEEKLY STAR** - Once 'home', I remember creating a Brentsville newspaper – a weekly two-sheet mimeographed affair, The Weekly Star, with co-founder and co-editor Morgan Earle Breeden, when I was 11. We sent a copy to President Eisenhower and got a nice letter in return; and we had a subscriber somewhere in Ohio, which impressed us no end. We sold ads to the two local grocery stores, and reported on neighborhood happenings. Our joint effort lasted several months (an eternity at age 11), at which time Morgan Earle and his family took it over and it became a church newspaper, I believe. Neither of us became Rupert Murdoch! But the experience foreshadowed newsletters and magazines I have been involved with ever since, and to this day the (now rare) smell of fresh mimeo ink brings back fond proto-journalistic memories.

I remember that though our house was big and we had a library and a grand piano, we never had much money ... and at times we had to live on credit extended by the local store. My father, as a film director on the wrong coast for his profession, had to travel far and wide to do his work – for the war department during World War Two, and for the Department of Agriculture in D.C. in the late 1940's (see his book, "How to Sleep on a Camel). As a free-lancer in the 1950's, however, work and money seemed more scarce and he took to working more and more in New York City, visiting us at home on weekends.

**CHANGING SCHOOLS** - In 1956 I was sent off to Washington DC to a private school for a year. My 9<sup>th</sup> grade was at Sidwell Friends School. I was boarded with family friends during the week, and rode to and from DC on the weekends with our neighbor Ralph Spear, who worked for the Office of Emergency Preparedness in that other White House where President's live and work. The thrill for this 14-year old was disembarking from Mr. Spear's car INSIDE the White House grounds,

(Continued on Page 7)

# Flashback

## BRENTSVILLE HAS FARMER'S CLASS

### G. W. Patterson, Agronomy Expert And Peyton Larkin Were Principal Speakers.

G. W. Patterson, former teacher of Agronomy at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, now of the Chilean Nitrate of Soda organization, talked at the evening class for adult farmers at Brentsville, last Friday night.

Taking for his subject "Fall Seeding of Grasses", Mr. Patterson gave a most interesting talk which developed a good discussion upon its conclusion, and brought out some definite improved practices on the best way of seeding Fall grasses.

Another interesting speaker of the evening was Mr. Peyton Larkin, who spoke on fertilizer, and traced its development, and pointed out the value, need and application of same.

The ladies of the community served refreshments and will continue to do so each Friday for the benefit of the Brentsville Graded School.

Interesting topics will be discussed each Friday and the public is invited to all of the meetings.

Source: The Manassas Journal, July 18, 1929

**A MILLION THANKS** to Ms. Mary Staggs for donating to Brentsville a "Book of Remembrances" of her mother, Mrs. Dorothy Woodhouse Varner who taught school here from 1930 until 1937. Watch for information from this book in future newsletters.

## Where WILD Things Live

Common Mullein  
*Verbascum thapsus*

This common biennial of Eurasian origin is one of the most conspicuous wildflower-weeds of summer displaying a clublike, sparsely flowered wand of bright yellow, 5-petaled blossoms. Its large, flannel-surfaced leaves, ridged and felted stem, and height of 2 to 6 feet are also distinctive. One never sees this spike blazing in full or even abundant flower; instead, the yellow blossoms emerge singly-2, 3, or 5 at once, low or high on a spike—often in a loose spiral pattern. This unevenness adds to the plant's coarse, somewhat ragged appearance. Flowers appear in June and last until fall, depending upon the spike height. Individual flowers do not last long, typically open before dawn and close in the afternoon. Although bisexual in form, the flowers are sequentially unisexual, undergoing a practical "sex change" during their brief tenure. The female part (*stigma*) matures and bends away from the later-maturing male parts (*stamens, anthers*), thus hindering self-pollination. The seeds have no dispersal mechanisms with most falling within three feet of the parent plant, creating an abundant seed bank in the soil. Seeds remain viable up to 100 years or more. There are documented cases where archaeological soil samples dating from 1300 have produced viable mullein seeds! Clearly this is a seed that remains long prepared to germinate whenever the right conditions offer.

Colonists brought common mullein to the New World sometime in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a medicinal herb and garden ornamental, becoming common in the East by 1820. It has a long history of medicinal usage since the time



and walking OUT through the gate on my way to the streetcar, while passing tourists wondered just who I might be.

The first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade I switched to Osborn High in Manassas (a different big yellow bus ride), where I made a new 'best friend,' Vernon Jones; and then mid-year we rented out the Brentsville home and moved to New York City as my parents struggled to keep their marriage together. That lasted only six months, and then we moved to Washington D.C. when their effort failed. My Mother eventually moved back to The White House in Brentsville, and lived there until her death in 1995.

FINAL THOUGHTS - What is now known as Old Town Brentsville remains remarkably the same as I remember it from childhood. The Wolfe house has crumbled (my mother always loved the unique design of the house, with every room in the oldest original part of the house on a different floor.) But once she bought it she could never afford to restore it, and so allowed it to gracefully succumb to the ravages of ivy, time and dry rot.

The empty lot to the east of our house (and the Stevens Store) which Mother also acquired, have become overgrown with trees .

The Courthouse complex has been restored. The 'Old Town' is now considered historic, and The White House, – thanks to Mother's efforts with and membership on the Prince William County Historical Commission in the 1970's – is now designated a 'landmark' because, as she discovered, it was at one time the home of the first female postmistress in the County!

Yes, the half mile that is the old town still occurs much as it did in the '40's and 50's, (paved road notwithstanding) and no matter where I have lived, or live now, to me a visit is still 'coming home.' It's clear to me that for Agnes Webster, the value of land was paramount, and The White House in Brentsville was her very own "Tara."

- DeLancey Webster  
January, 2003  
Los Angeles  
[www.lancecoach.com](http://www.lancecoach.com)

Update: The Brentsville Courthouse is only days away from final restoration. There are tentative plans to have an open house during October to celebrate this event. More details will be provided next month. PLEASE plan on attending. You will be surprised! We promise.

of Hippocrates. This plant was probably the "phlomos" that was widely prescribed as a treatment for various ailments. "Many of the ailments that plague mankind from ear aches to dysentery to toothaches," wrote naturalist Sarah Hopkins, "were thought to be alleviated by mullein medications" in teas, decoctions, and infusions, plus poultices for warts and slivers. Primarily used as a respiratory remedy for coughs, congestion, and bronchial and lung disorders, mullein leaves were smoked in pipes for such purposes. When dried, after the fuzz disappears, the leaves, which contain soothing mucilage and anti-inflammatory properties, make a bland, mildly sedative tea. Mullein also contains coumarin and rotenone, powerful compounds with toxic effects. The latter is a well-known *piscicide* (fish killer); pioneers in Virginia would throw the plant into water, then harvest the intoxicated fish brought to surface.

Mullein also had a host of non medicinal uses. The ancients reportedly used the dried stalks dipped in tallow for funeral torches and the downy, rolled leaves for incendiary lamp wicks. Although Native American tribes had no historic association with the plant, many adopted the pioneer habit of inserting the big, soft leaves inside footwear and clothing for effective insulation. Colonists also used it as a homemade cosmetic called "Quaker rouge," the rubefacient, flannel-like leaves raise a red blush (that is, contact dermatitis) on the rubbed face. Roman and American women alike used the bright yellow dye produced by boiling the flowers for coloring hair and clothing.

Source: *The Book of Field and Roadside – Open-Country Weeds, Trees, and Wildflowers of Eastern North America* by John Eastman

# Brentsville Neighbors

Information About Brentsville  
Shared Among Neighbors  
Contact us via e-mail on:  
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Note: Please let us know if your newsletter last month had missing or duplicate pages and we will replace it. We are aware that several got out incorrectly and have no way of knowing how many more may have slipped through that crack!

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