

Brentsville Neighbors



Information About Brentsville
Shared Among Neighbors
June 2010



Welcome Neighbors,

And welcome to June – the traditional month for weddings. During this month many will be celebrating anniversaries and we wish much happiness and joy to each. While searching through the microfilm copy of The Journal Messenger in the Bull Run Library, we recently found in the September 13, 1912, publication the following announcement: “The marriage of Mr. G. B. Shumaker, of South West Virginia, and Miss Ella Armentrout, at Bradley, Va., September 25, is announced. Miss Armentrout is a daughter of Mr. R. P. Armentrout, of this county. Rev. Abraham Conner will perform the ceremony.” This, then, became the subject of our “Flashback” column. Of course most of us remember Grady with his second wife, Violet, but his children, especially Anna Belle, James Robert Henry, and Benjamin Wilson Shoemaker, all by his first wife, are fondly remembered citizens of our town.

Not so traditional in June is the appearance of snakes in what seems to be large numbers at times. Two recent events bring this to mind. The first was a panic phone call from Rob Orrison, Site Manager of the Courthouse Centre, informing us that the jail was full of snakes! With camera in hand, we found one window that has recently been used by birds as a nesting place now occupied by a large snake with a very bulging middle. The mother bird was not happy and may have even added to the meal. Another window contained multiple black

Reader Feedback

Thanks again for the newsletter. Hanne and I read it all the way through as soon as we receive it. We enjoy the pictures of our friends from Brentsville. You should check the water supply's in Brentsville, our friends all seem to be getting older! It has been 30 years since we moved to Colorado.

I talk with Larry Miles regularly on the phone and he would like to receive the Brentsville Newsletter.

Eddie & Hanne Powell

snakes—the subject of our “Where Wild Things Live” story this month. A very large black rat snake with what appeared to be a much smaller (believed to be a mating male) snake entwined all but filled the window! These were allowed to do whatever they were doing and they left during the night. The second event was the rescue and release of a beautiful partial albino corn snake on the grounds that will be the focus of next month's column.

And finally, with June comes the start of summer. A time when kids run barefoot to their favorite swimming hole and enjoy life in a small town atmosphere. Do you have a story to tell?

Very best wishes,
Nelson & Morgan

This month:

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Circulation: 187 - 66 Electronic

- A Letter from Brentsville ---- pages 6 & 8
- When War Came ----- page 7

FLASHBACK

A Pretty Wedding at Bradley.

Bradley was the scene of a pretty wedding, when Miss Mary Ellen Armentrout, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. P. Armentrout, and Mr. Grady Benjamin Shoemaker, son of Mr. and Mrs. H. A. Shoemaker—both of this county—were united in marriage at the Brethren church at Bradley, Wednesday morning, September 25, at 11 o'clock.

The bride was attired in a beautiful lavender silk.

Mrs. Shoemaker is an accomplished young lady and has many friends who wish her much happiness though her married life.

The groom wore a suit of brown and is a young man of sterling qualities and has a host of friends who wish him success.

Among the first to enter the church were the license bearers, Misses Bessie Baker and Lizzie Armentrout, cousin and sister of the bride, followed by two couples of waiters, Miss Anna Goode of Woodstock, and Mr. E. C. Green and Miss Otelia Maphis and Mr. Romp Shoemaker, brother of the groom. Then came the bride and the groom. They marched in church and formed a semicircle around the altar and the Rev. Mr. Conner performed the ceremony.

The bride and groom received many congratulations. The relatives of the bride and groom and some friends went to the home of the bride where a fine wedding dinner was served in old Virginia style.

The young couple received many presents from far and near. The ushers were Mr. R. J. Green and the bride's brother.

Source: The Manassas Journal, October 4, 1912.

Where W I L D Things Live

Black Rat Snake *Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*

Description: The common rat snake is medium-sized, averaging 42 to 72 inches in length. At the widest point of the snake's body, its average diameter is 1.5 inches. The rat snake is covered with keeled scales, and has a powerful slender body with a wedge-shaped head. The anal plate of the common rat snake is divided.

The black rat snake, as the name implies, is completely black except for a white chin. Hatchlings of the black rat snake have a pale grey background with black blotches along the back. As the snake matures, the color becomes darker until the snake reaches its adult phase. Hatchlings are often mistaken for copperheads because their skin patterns are similar.

Common rat snakes tend to be shy and, if possible, will avoid being confronted. If these snakes are seen and confronted by danger, they tend to freeze and remain motionless. Some adults attempt to protect themselves. They coil their body and vibrate their tails in dead leaves to simulate a rattle. If the snakes continue to be provoked, they will strike.

Rat snakes produce a foul-smelling musk and release it on the predator if they are picked up, spreading the musk around with their tail. The musk acts as a deterrent. A few of the rat snake subspecies tend to be more aggressive. The black rat snake is very snappy. Rat snakes are excellent swimmers.

Distribution and Habitat: The black rat snake is the most widely distributed common rat snake with a range from New England south through Georgia and west across the northern parts of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and north through Oklahoma to southern Wisconsin.

Common rat snakes live in a variety of habitats with each subspecies preferring a slightly different one. Some of these habitats overlap with one another. Common rat snakes are excellent climbers and

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Where WILD things live..



Black Rat Snake

Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta
(See page 2)

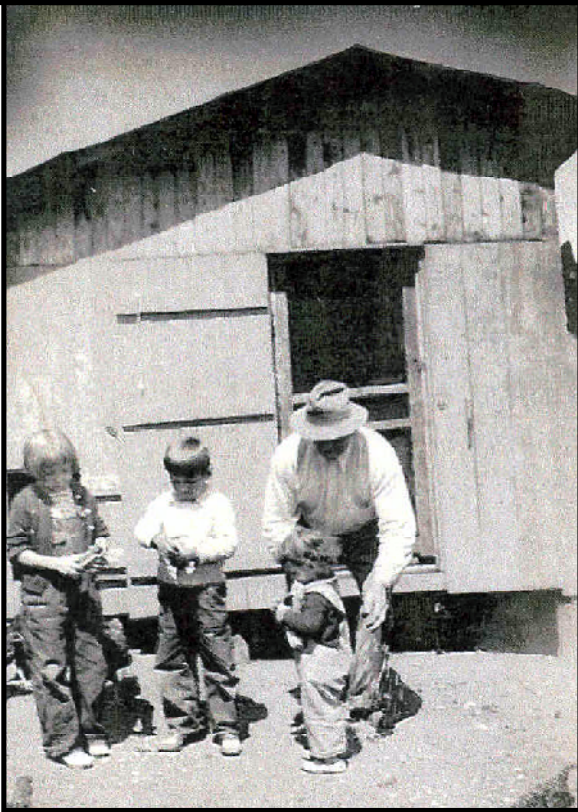


Above: Louise Keys Bell, September 2003

Above right: Louise Keys Burdette and Kay
in Hyattstown.

Lower right: Sitting on the back porch of our
Hyattstown home with Trixie





Grady Shoemaker with his granddaughter, Jackie Pope, grandnephew William "Billy" Norton Wade and grandniece Barbara Ellen Wade



Grady Benjamin Shoemaker and his second wife, Violet Louellen (Keys) Shoemaker

Right: David Landis and Louise Keys, 1942/43, taken at the Ermine and Thelma Wade home on "D" Street, Washington. David and Thelma are brother & sister.



Photographs this page courtesy of Bill Wade

Remembering Mama

Part Two

Kay Breeden

In 1953 we left D.C. and moved to the country to live in the old house in Hyattstown, Maryland where granddaddy Ralph Burdette had grown up. This was a different life for a city girl like me. The house was masonry and over a hundred years old with no indoor plumbing. There was a chemical toilet in an upstairs room (with a metal seat) – stifling hot in the summer with no ventilation and bees buzzing around and freezing in the winter. You didn't linger any longer than necessary. There was no running water in the house. We filled a bucket from the spigot on the back porch and had an enamel dipper to ladle out water for drinking and cooking. In the winter, the upper spigot was closed off and we had to go down the steps from the porch to the basement to draw water. During really cold spells we had a kerosene heater going to prevent frozen pipes. The house was cooler than other types during the heat of summer but also rambling and hard to heat in winter. We had an oil stove in the foyer where the stairs were located and a wood stove in the dining room. When not needed in the basement, the small kerosene heater was used to warm the kitchen. The downstairs living room was closed off and not used in the winter. My bedroom was at the top of the stairs over the foyer—the warmest place in the entire house. My parents bedroom was large and received very little heat filtering through from my space. The other two rooms upstairs were kept closed off and used for storage.

The daily routines of life here were very different from a city apartment. My mother heated water on the stove to wash dishes in a small dishpan, then the pan of water was thrown out from the porch to the yard. The same was necessary for laundry each week. Buckets of water were heated on the stove to fill the wringer-washer which was kept covered on the back porch. A large wash tub was filled with cold water to rinse the clothes which were hung to dry on a clothesline strung between the porch post and the apple tree. This line was also where my dog, Trixie, was allowed to run on a leash when not used for laundry. Then the tub was dumped and the washer emptied out from the stone step leading to the porch. The grass in that area was the greenest and lushest you could ever imagine. Of course the wash tub was also used for baths on Saturday night every week, each of us in turn. Wow! What an ordeal for my mother to contend with week in and week out. In winter the clothes froze on the line outside and so did the fingers hanging them out and bringing them inside later on. She always tied a kerchief

over her head when doing the outside chores. This was a practice of my grandmother too when outside in cold or bad weather. It reminded me of pictures I had seen of European women in their headgear.

Mama had a rock garden shaded by a pear tree at the back of the house where our driveway came up from the main road through Hyattstown, Route 240. She loved working in the flowers and always planted zinnias, cosmos, nasturtiums and bachelor's button there. The fruit from the pear tree was put to use also. Mama usually had enough available to make a few jars of pear preserves, the best ever.

Our next door neighbors who shared our driveway were Mr. Cliff Anderson, his wife Roxie and her mother, Carmye Norwood. Mr. Cliff was a huckster who left home in the wee hours of morning to go to the market in D. C., load up his truck with fresh vegetables and then drove his route to sell to his regular customers. Often when he had some produce left he shared with us, so I remember lots of fresh foods. Mr. Cliff also raised little white pigs which he slaughtered and turned into sausage and some of this, too, was shared with us. Those pigs were the cleanest I've ever seen and there was none of the strong odor usually associated with a pigpen. He cleaned up after them every day and washed them regularly with the hose. They had a huge rain barrel at the corner of their house near the back door. Mrs. Norwood had spider plants surrounding their outdoor pump that were always tall and lovely. Seeds from these were shared with us too, and so in later years Mama always had spider plants in her flower beds. We had no telephone in our house so relied on the Anderson's to take important messages for us or to offer the use of their phone when we needed to make a call. Sometimes I was sent next door to call Nannie Keys in Brentsville. You dialed "0" to get the operator, told her to reverse the charges (meaning my grandparents would pay for the long distance charge for the call) and gave her their number which was 512W11. Funny that it has stayed in my memory all these years. We were fortunate to have neighbors like these. On the other side of us lived my dad's aunt, Lillie Stone. I don't remember ever using her phone. On Halloween we all dressed in our costumes and walked in small groups to visit all the houses in town before gathering at the firehouse for a party with food, treats and games sponsored by the firemen and their ladies' auxiliary. At the Anderson house we were each treated to a homemade doughnut, fresh from the cooker.

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A Letter from Brentsville

Brentsville July 18th 1830

Dear Uncle

It was with great pleasure I last rec^d your promised letter & hasten to give it a prompt reply. I began to think you had entirely forgotten that you had any ties in PW^m however I suppose there is some excuse for you as you had so many to write to that you had just arrived at my turn. We are all quite well & in fact the Country (County?) generally is as healthy as I ever knew it in my life. Milton Fitzhugh & myself took a trip down the County about a month since to try our luck but returned perfectly satisfied that we even most appreciated where we were best known (at home) I was equally as unsuccessful as in former days. It was my last effort to succeed in that region. I find it no use & therefore will never return again, but still she is a dear little creation. The past shall ever be like a pleasant dream to memory dear. tis no use knocking at the when you cant get in.

Our neighborhood has been quite gay for some time in fact ever since our new acquisition Mr^s L^r Muschett there has been much respect shown her and many parties given.

There are good many young ladies visiting our neighborhood & village at this time & some of them very pretty. I have not had an opportunity of being much with them as yet but expect to be there in future. I have almost fallen in love with one of them a Miss Gibson a niece of Co^l. Gibson of Fleetwood dec^d she is a splendid girl & I understand she has said on several accasions to his intimate friends that she ^thought I was a young man of the finest countenances she ever saw altho not handsome with all but one thing she feels certain of & that is it indicates a true sincere & kind heart. Now really this is something more flattering than

I am accustomed to I hope she may never have cause to change from her first impressions, & if I should conclude to offer ^her this heart that she may receive it & that it may prove her first impressions true sincere & kind, enough of love as you are a novice in such matters of course it is uninteresting. Well by the aid of Guano & I suppose good management I made this year the greatest growth of straw I ever saw but the wheat was much injured by the rust I think nearly one half it is a general thing in this whole County the wheat crop from being the most flatering? I ever saw by the effects of rust in a few days dwindled to nothing had it not been for the rust my crop would have been good for at least one thousand Bu. Corn hay oats & c__g flatering Compton farm sold a few days since for 15\$ pr acre which was very low I was in hopes Uncle Edmund should have bought it but he could not give up old Hunting Hill.

This day is a day of much excitement in this County (Country?) oweing to the very unsettled state of affairs in reference to our Union owing to the recent death of Genl. Taylor which has produced a general mourning & much anxiety & fear & distrust of Fillmore owing to this being the day of (crossed out) fireid / picked (?) for a convention in our town to nominate candidates to represent this district in the Convention to assemble next October to revise & amend our present Constitution the District is comprised of Stafford P^rW^m Fairfax & Alexandria Counties each County entitled to one delegate. Jasper seems to be the favourite in this County I shall vote for him myself. there is much excitement here each person pushing the claims of his favourite as to the new Constitution there is a great difference of opinion some want one thing & some

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When WAR Came to Brentsville

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, VA., Manassas Junction, June 17, 1861.

Colonel W.B. BATE,
Commanding at Camp Jackson, Brooke's Station,
Stafford Co., Va.:

COLONEL: As it would be important to re-enforce the troops under my command as soon as practicable should the enemy advance from Alexandria, I have to suggest that you obtain the approval of General Holmes and of the Secretary of War to your throwing forward your regiment (two would be preferable) and a battery to my support. A good position for them to occupy would be Brentsville, a few miles southeast of here, where they would protect my rear, and be prepared also to act against any force the enemy attempting to land at Quantico Creek or even at Aquia Creek.

I have already informed General Holmes, through his aide, Colonel Lacy, of the necessity of establishing a battery and supporting force at the mouth of the former creek, but I am unable to do at present for the reason given above; hence I would be happy to have him do it if in his power. I would suggest also the necessity of establishing immediately a telegraph station near your headquarters and another near those of Lieutenant-Colonel Green, at Camp Chopawamsic, near Evansport, so as to be in telegraphic communication with this place, via Richmond, for a most thorough and perfect concert of action must exist between our different military departments to insure victory to our arms and success to our glorious cause.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

G.T. BEAUREGARD,
Brigadier-General, Commanding.

P.S.-What has become of the probable hot-shot furnace I sent to General Lee from Charleston for the defense of the Potomac? It ought to be at Aquia Creek. I beg you send a copy of this letter, through General Holmes, to the Secretary of War, with such remarks as both may wish to add to it.

[Indorsement.]

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT,
Brooke's Station, June 18, 1861.

I disagree with General Beauregard as to the propriety of detaching any part of this command.

The point designated by him is entirely out of reach of Aquia Creek. If this command is relieved, it should be on the supposition that there is no danger to be apprehended of an invasion from near here, and in that event nearly the whole command should be sent.

Respectfully forwarded.

TH. H. HOLMES,
Brigadier-General, Commanding Department.

another I fear it will be like this web of the spider when broken

Who of the living can foretell
That it will ever be United as well

I greatly fear the change will be productive of little good & may be of much injury but such is the fickleness of man never to be satisfied with what they have and it is a sweet sign & they ought to be satisfied with them. Tomorrow is the day of execution of a poor miserable creature who killed her Master while asleep under the belief as she says that there was no greater punishment for such a due than the lash poor ignorant creature if such be tried is much to be pried she says her conscience forbid the act _____ but the devil urged her on & if she could bring her master to life she would then be willing to meet her god. Bob Weir & Sister are at Capon Springs & will be there for some time. Aunt Jane & Bert are here & quite well Aunt Ann & children are quite well Emma is still going to school in Fairfax & seems much pleased. The ladies of Brentsville & vicinity intend having a fair soon to assist the Son of Temperance in building a Hall I hope you formed ?? by this time I am delighted to hear that Griffin & Taylor has joined I intend writing to Grif & Aunt Sarah soon give my best love to them & their children may god bless them for their dear to me I would like very much to see them & hope I shall (?) be able to come out next winter. give my love to Ginnie & Taylor & say to him I think he owes me a letter but I will write to him soon.

& adieu write soon your (??) WW
Thornton

spend a lot of time in trees. Black rat snakes live at elevations from sea level to high altitudes in the Appalachian Mountains. Black rat snakes live in habitats ranging from a rocky hillside to flat farmland.

Diet in the Wild: Rat snakes are primarily known as rodent eaters, however other food preferences do exist. As juveniles, rat snakes eat small lizards, baby mice, and an occasional small frog. A dult rat snakes have a diet mainly consisting of mice and rats, but also include chipmunks, moles, and other small rodents. Adults also eat bird eggs and young. Rat snakes kill their prey by constriction.

Reproduction: Like most snakes, rat snakes are egg layers. Between March and May, snakes begin to emerge from their winter hibernation. After a few weeks, they begin to seek out a mate, typically in late April, May, and early June. Males tend to wait for the females to pass through their territory, and, by using pheromones, communicate and initiate the mating process with the female. The male snake approaches the female, lines up with her, and attempts to wrap his tail around hers with their vents nearly touching. Some males grasp the female with the mouth, to hold her in place and prevent her from moving away. The male then erects his hemipenes and inserts it into the female's cloaca while several small spines anchor the hemipenes firmly. Mating may last only a few minutes or span a few hours.

Five weeks later, the female lays 12 to 20 eggs. The eggs are laid in a hidden area, under hollow logs or leaves, or in abandoned burrows. The eggs hatch 65 to 70 days later. The hatchlings of common rat snakes are vigorous eaters and double their size rather quickly. If conditions are good, females sometimes produce two clutches of eggs a year. Their life span is unknown.

Fun Facts: Rat snakes are very useful around barns and in farming communities because they help control pest populations. Their habitat is slowly being reduced due to land development and the cutting of trees. However, they continue to maintain a healthy population. Due to people's lack of knowledge and fear of snakes, rat snakes continue to be the victim of human persecution.

Source: <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/ReptilesAmphibians/Facts/FactSheets/Blackratsnake.cfm>

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My dad was a volunteer fireman with the Hyattstown Volunteer Fire Department and my mother was a member of the auxiliary. It was started in 1929 by my Great-grandfather, Webster V. Burdette, with the help of his son, Ralph (my grandfather), who was then Chief of the Kensington VFD. When the siren went off at the firehouse, my dad would jump in the car, head down the driveway and try to beat Joe Price from across the road down to the bottom of the hill to the firehouse. Joe was married to Dad's cousin Rebecca. By that time the Burdette boys who worked in the family auto dealership next door to the firehouse were driving the trucks out and preparing to head out to answer the emergency call. I remember one call involved the crash of a United Airlines plane in the woods behind my childhood friend Anna Norwood's house. Anna's mother drove the school bus that took us to Clarksburg Elementary School. It was eerie seeing the silver airplane body a few yards from their back door. The other really big call was the night Carroll Burdette's barn burned. Apparently they had stored some bales of green hay that spontaneously ignited and by the time it was noticed, it was a full-fledged raging fire, during the middle of the night of course. There were units from Damascus, Poolesville, Germantown and I think Gaithersburg as well as Hyattstown trying to handle the blaze. My mother and the other ladies made sandwiches and filled thermoses with hot coffee to serve the firefighters when they took a break from their duties. I had the task of carrying the sugar and cream for their coffee as they were manning the hoses. I remember lots of mud from all the water being pumped. This event was only topped by the night Shoemaker's garage burned in Brentsville, right across the street from my bedroom window.

During the summer the firemen traveled to participate in parades hosted by the other volunteer fire companies in our area. They would wash and clean the trucks, polish the chrome and wear their uniforms while riding on the back or along the side running boards of the trucks. Trophies were awarded for the best-looking departments and Hyattstown won their share of these which were displayed in a case at the fire hall. They also had tug-of-war and hook-up competitions. In the hook-ups the firemen had to pull a section of hose from the truck, get it hooked on to the connection, run out to its length and the first to pump water out the nozzle won the prize. Mama was a member of the marching unit of the ladies' auxiliary who participated in the parades and won trophies for their drills while traversing the parade route. They wore dark blue skirts, a white blouse, a dark blue cape lined with gold and blue and gold caps. They would practice their drills every week so they would be in step and crisp when performing.

Hyattstown hosted a parade each year which ended up at Mountain View Park at the upper end of

town. This was the site for their carnival that ran for a week and brought in funds to keep the department going and provide for the purchase of new equipment. There was a bingo tent set up, games operated by the firemen, rides for the children including a Ferris wheel (my favorite) and a kitchen where the auxiliary sold food. I helped my dad operate the booth where you won a pack of cigarettes if you could knock it off the shelf with the corks fired from small cork guns. I reloaded the guns and set up the packs after they went off. They had a penny pitch set up where I won glassware to give as gifts at Christmas. I now have a green glass bowl I gave Nannie Keys one year. The bingo games cost five cents to play and one year my mom won enough games to take home a step stool for our kitchen. They had entertainment on a stage on Saturday night and a couple of years it featured Jimmy Dean and his Texas Wildcats. The largest money maker though was the raffle of a new Pontiac donated by Burdette Brothers. Everyone held their breath on Saturday night at the finale for the drawing of the winning ticket. My dad's sister won the car one year. We never did win. I wanted to have a fire-engine red convertible when I grew up.

During that time mama didn't drive so we depended on my dad or neighbors for transportation. Mama rode to PTA meetings with Rebecca Price. We went once a week to the A&P in Frederick to get our groceries and anything else not available at our small local store. Hyattstown has many features similar to those of Brentsville including the small family-owned been there forever store. Hyattstown was originally laid out in a grid like Brentsville with side streets and alleys containing square building lots but ended up with a row of houses on either side of the main road through town, now route 355. It too had a local school attended by the seven Burdette siblings. Each of the three boys ended up married to one of the young ladies who came to teach there: Uncle Willie Lloyd to Aunt Maud, Uncle Dolley to Aunt Maude and my grandfather, Ralph, to Susan T. Dalrymple, my Nannie Susie. In Brentsville Miss Dorothy Woodhouse, a young teacher, married local boy Robert Varner. In Hyattstown as in Brentsville I was surrounded by and heavily involved with a large extended family. My cousins and I were in school together and spent lots of after-school and summer time playing and hanging out. My closest cousin, Gil Price, and I published a newspaper together named the Hyattstown Gazette. We included news from our neighbors in town, school events, our church news and maybe a few jokes. We typed it on an old Royal typewriter and Gil's dad mimeographed it for us. The cost was five cents a copy. Sound familiar? It seems a real coincidence that Morgan and I both produced our own local newspaper as kids and here we are today working on Brentsville Neighbors.

(Perhaps more in a future edition.)

Brentsville Neighbors

Information About Brentsville
Shared Among Neighbors

Contact us on:
morganbreeden@aol.com

We wish to thank John & Joan Fries who have entrusted to our care certain historical ledgers that contain valuable information on Brentsville and other locations. This information is being copied and compiled and will be made available to our readers in future months. The actual ledgers will stand only limited handling but will be available for review in the near future.

IN GOD WE TRUST

Brentsville Neighbors
c/o Morgan Breeden
9721 Windy Hill Drive
Nokesville, VA 20181

