

Brentsville Neighbors



Information About Brentsville
Shared Among Neighbors
December 2005



Welcome Neighbor!

No time of the year brings neighbors closer than does Christmas. So many memories... I can't say I remember too many chestnuts roasting on an open fire but I do know we tried it once or twice.

Christmas is the time for giving, the time for caring. It is said that friends and neighbors add meaning to Christmas. It is the time for our coming together with joyful voices. Or, perhaps just as important, the quiet time spent remembering—another time or another place. However you spend your Christmas, we wish you health, happiness and much success in the new year.

Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year!

Best regards,
Nelson Keys & Morgan Breeden

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Featured Historical Building

The Home of John F. Wolfe
Early to mid 1800's

Square No. 5, Lot No. 16 (Plat of Brentsville, Prince William County, Virginia as recorded in Deed Book 8, pages 348-9, November 30, 1822.)

The home now owned by John "Freddy" and Hazel Wolfe was built in the early 1800's with the exact data still to be determined. While employed at the U.S. Marine Corps Base, Quantico, one of Freddy's co-workers, J.R. Tatem, Jr., was studying for a real estate license and one of the requirements was to perform a title search on a specific property for his Term Paper. He was complaining that most of the homes in the area were only about 10 years old and didn't present much of a challenge. Freddy suggested his home was more than 10 years old and might be a good one to use. J.R. agreed and went to the Manassas Courthouse with pen in hand one bright morning in June, 1983. Little did he realize at the time just how old or just how much information would be involved! He reportedly found at least two – possibly three – titles that were hand written and not sufficiently legible to be of significant use for this particular project. Much of the information in this report is derived from the Tatem Term Paper.

And so, the first reported (but not the first actual) owner was Anna A. Reid, et al, who transferred the property to Joseph B. Reid recorded April 26, 1874, Deed Book 29, Page 512.

Joseph and his wife, Margaret V. (Keys) Reid (daughter of William H. and Harriett Keys) were married on January 13, 1859 in Prince William County and may have continued to live here until they sold the property to Augustus Jacobs. This transaction was recorded August 14, 1885 in Deed Book 35, page 556.

Three years later, Augustus sold the property to French J. and Ada Davis in a transaction that was recorded August 9, 1888, in Deed Book 38, page 241, where they started their family. Mrs. Ada

Davis was no stranger to this region. She was born at Brentsville on February 11, 1867, the daughter of Lucian and Emma Williams Davis. Her grandfather was Capt. Lucian Davis, clerk of the Prince William county court in the days when Brentsville was the county seat. She was a member of the Baptist Church and of the Daughters of the Confederacy.²

Somewhere along here the north-west corner of the building was made into a general store and, at some point, post office. We know French J. Davis took over postmaster duties from Arthur W. Sinclair on April 3, 1882.³ Eugene M. Scheel wrote the following in "Crossroads and Corners" (date not provided): *Main post-Civil War enterprises were Wyman W. Kincheloe's store, a fixture through the century, and the competing store of brothers J.J. and J.T.J. Davis, trading as Davis & Company.*"

With all likelihood, the building served as a combination general store, post office and residence. Just when the post office moved into the building is not yet known. It was started (somewhere) in Brentsville in 1824 and may have moved from building to building, depending on several factors. Operating the post office resulted in a substantial benefit with some saying it nearly doubled ones household income.

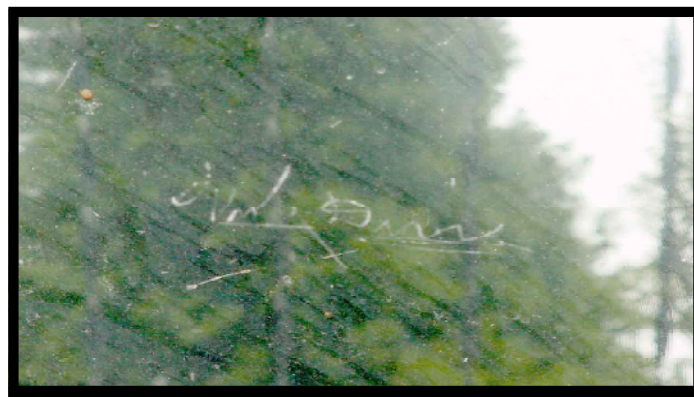
It is not clear why, but the property was transferred from J.B.T. Thornton (Trustee substitute in lieu of C.E. Nicol – 1st Trustee) to Ada Davis by Special Warranty and was recorded August 23, 1898 in Deed Book 45, page 370. Then, following the death of French (c 1907), Ada moved with her family to Manassas where she lived until her death in March 1928. Both French and Ada Davis are buried in the Brentsville Cemetery behind the former Stephens Store. Surviving Ada were two daughters; Mrs. P. L. "Viola" Proffitt and Miss Emma Lois Davis, of Manassas; three sons Mr.

Continued on page 6.



Featured Historical Building

Home of John F. Wolfe
Early to mid 1800's



Window pane with the name of Viola Davis scratched
in the glass

Where WILD things grow...



Those pesky cockleburs! (See page 7)

Memories of Christmas Past



THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION WAS WRITTEN BY KAY BREEDEN “IN HER OWN WORDS” ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 16, 2003.

A Brentsville Christmas

by Kay Breedon

The celebration of the Christmas holiday has always been special to our family – a time for gathering together, enjoying a wonderful meal, exchanging gifts and giving thanks for a chance to do this is a warm enveloping home. My mother still tells me that every year as a small child, I insisted on coming to spend Christmas in Brentsville with Nannie Keys. Perhaps because of the many family members we would see there, or that there were other children to play with or simply that it was a happy place to be. The tree was always in the front corner of the living room by the window with its angel at the top looking down on us and the hypnotic bubbling lights among the branches. Most of the ornaments were old – silvered glass balls and delicate hand-blown reindeer. Artificial snow-covered trees and more reindeer sat underneath the tree. Cheryl, Bo and I hung our socks—yes, socks we wore—with thumbtacks on the wall by the chimney hoping for Santa to fill them with goodies. Sure enough, on Christmas morning they contained a treasure trove. There was always an orange in the toe followed by nuts in the shell, hard candies, chocolate drops and coconut bars, a candy cane and a small toy of some kind. One year I found a pair of tiny china baby dolls in my sock. What a treat! I played with them all that day. This seems like meager fare by today’s standards, but to us in the 1950’s it was all we could ever want.

After Aunt Dinny’s house was built, the tradition was to gather there first thing Christmas morning for breakfast. Everyone brought in boxes filled with gifts to add to those already surrounding the huge tree sitting in front of the picture window in the living room. Uncle Shorty served eggnog sprinkled with nutmeg and had a gift for



everyone at his bar in the basement. Then came the distribution of the gifts to everyone gathered in the living and dining rooms. This scene was absolute chaos as wrapping paper was ripped off, balled up and tossed away, exclamations were loud and thank-yous were shouted across the room. The real challenge was keeping the gifts together in an organized location, especially with the kids taking things out of boxes, losing the gift tags and leaving their things scattered all over the house.

After Nannie passed away, our Christmas gathering shifted to my mother’s home in Catlett for dinner and the annual exchange of gifts. We were joined by Uncle Doug, Aunt Georgie and Uncle Nelson and sometimes members of John’s family. The house in Catlett is small so we were often in tight quarters, but everyone ate until they were stuffed. Then the opening of the gifts was again a chaotic scene on a smaller scale—less people, but just as much noise and commotion, exclamations of surprise and thank-yous all around.

Now, the tradition of Christmas dinner and gifting has shifted again to our home, just a mile south of Brentsville. We have space enough here to accommodate everyone and all the assembled containers of gifts. Connie helps to prepare the main parts of our dinner with contributions from other family members—my mother’s Jell-O salad and Aunt Georgie’s cherry cheese pie among them. We enjoy sharing the meal, we open the myriad of gifts everyone has brought, we talk about the hot topics in the news but most special of all is the chance to reflect on times past, to reminisce about all the Christmas celebrations over the years and to look forward to next year when we will gather again for a Brentsville Christmas.

Note: While conducting research, we are sometimes very pleasantly pleased with what is found and sometimes a bit deflated. The latter is the case here. For as long as anyone knew, Gladys & AV Eanes were the first to be married in the Union Church. This obituary written in 1915, taken from Ron Turners' Prince William County Virginia Obituaries (1900 – 1930), Copyright 1996, now shows this was not the case. Who would have thunk it!

Flashback

Woodyard, Millie Tyler - 04 Jun 1915 M. J. - At six o'clock yesterday evening Mrs. James Woodyard passed away at her home at Brentsville in her forty-third year. Mrs. Woodyard, who was a victim of tuberculosis, was Miss Millie Tyler before her marriage. She has resided at Brentsville all her life, and is well known in that community.

Mrs. Woodyard is survived by her husband and eleven children. The children are Rozier, Benjamin, James, Harvey, Peter, Paul, Daniel, Alice, Susie, Catherine and Mrs. Lillie Keys. She leaves no brothers or sisters. Funeral services will be conducted at the Brentsville Baptist Church, of which the deceased was a member, by Dr. H. L. Quarles tomorrow afternoon at one o'clock. Interment will be made in Valley View Cemetery.

The following was taken from 18 Jun 1915 Manassas Journal - The deceased was married 26 years ago in the "Union Church" at Brentsville, her native village, by the sanity and beloved Rev. B. P. Dulin, and many remember the young and blushing bride, just entering womanhood. Though the mother of fourteen children, she retained to the last her youthful beauty.

(Cont. from page 2)

Lucian A. Davis of Washington, and Messrs. Eugene Davis and Raymond J. Davis, both of Manassas.⁴

Children probably have changed little over the past century – only the things they have to play with have changed so much. Did you ever write your name on a wall in your home? Or scratch your initials in a desk or table somewhere? Well, their daughter, Viola Davis (now Proffitt) may have been engaged while she lived there. She may have had a pretty diamond ring. But for sure, she managed to use either a ring or something equally hard to scratch her name in the window pane in the front room! (Evidence! See picture #2)

Anyhow, back to the story. Ada sold the house to Frank E. Bell with the transaction recorded on November 10, 1906, Deed Book 56, page 370 who, along with his wife, Rose E. Bell, passed it on 4½ years later to W.J. Bell (their son?) by transaction dated May 25, 1911 in Deed Book 61, pages 107-8. W.J. and Mary A. Bell appear to have remained there until they sold the property to Roy Molair and his wife Willie with the transaction recorded August 10, 1915 in Deed Book 66, pages 303-4. Again, it is not clear just when Roy (actually most people referred to him fondly as "Tinker" Molair) started working in the store but verbal accounts from Nelson Keys indicate he "tended" the store for some time prior to his assuming ownership. The store may not have been stocked with a lot of frills but it carried the necessities. It was also during this period (1909) that the decision was made to close the post office – probably caused by diminished business. (Look for a more detailed report on the postoffices of Brentsville in January.)

Gladys (Wolfe) Eanes tells the story of her brothers sneaking eggs out of the henhouse and trading them to Tinker for cigarettes. Nelson Keys remembers on "one or two" occasions taking a penny or two to the store for the same reason. It seems Tinker was also the recipient of many Halloween pranks. "Nothing serious, just fun stuff!" assures Gladys. Things like having his door nailed shut – or having the bench that ran across the front of the porch end up on the roof.

With the death of Roy's wife, Willie, her share of the property conveyed to Roy (her husband) and Ethel (Molair) Cornwell, their daughter. Ethel is the wife of Owen Cornwell. They retained ownership of the property until sold to O.C. Frederick, recorded May 12, 1943 in Deed Book 108, pages 457-8. It is about this time the store went out of business because of competition from Hilman Keys just down the road.

O.C. and Anna G Frederick remained here for the next three years until they sold the home to Rev. J.M. and Vera Eggleston Bell. This sale was recorded in Deed Book 116, page 329 on September 4, 1945. During 1948 the Rev. Bell died and Vera remarried William Harvey Gray. They lived here together until 1955 when Mr. Gray also passed away. In late July, 1950, Vera married again, to James Mifflin Keys, Jr., oldest son of Uncle Miff

who lived in Brentsville his entire life. With two established homes, Vera decided to move to the home of her husband so sold the property to John F. (Freddy) and Hazel May Wolfe in a transaction that was recorded on October 17, 1961, in Deed Book 275, page 631.

Freddy and Hazel raised their son, Cary John Eugene Wolfe (who was six at the time) and daughter, Catherine Michelle Wolfe (who was just one year old) in their new home. They are still there today except for the time Freddy is out fishing or gunning for Bambi.

(Footnotes)

1 Prince William County Virginia Marriages 1854 – 1938 (N through Z) Copyright 2002 Ronald Ray Turner

2 Prince William County Virginia Obituaries (1900 – 1930), Copyright 1996 by Ronald Ray Turner

3 Post Offices and Post Masters of Prince William Co., Virginia, 1776 – 1971, compiled by William C. Riter, Dale City, VA 1992.

Where the WILD things grow..

Cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*)
(See picture on page 4)

The Cockleburs are flowering plants of the daisy family. They are coarse, herbaceous annual plants that produce seeds in the form of hard, spiny, football-shaped burs that stick to fur and clothing and can be quite difficult to extract. Cockleburs produce two kinds of flowers. One kind, in short terminal branches, produces only pollen. The other kind, in clusters in the axils of the leaves, produces seed. Unlike many other members of the family, whose seeds are airborne with a plume of silky hairs resembling miniature parachutes, the seeds of the cocklebur are enclosed in a small, hard, double-chambered, oval bur about 3/4" long. It is covered with stiff, hooked spines. The inventor of Velcro, George de Mestral, got the idea of a hooked-spine fastener from cockleburs. This plant reproduces only by means of its seed. These remarkable burred seeds have allowed this plant to be carried all over the world by unsuspecting travelers. The two seeds in a cocklebur's spiny fruit are covered by airtight coats. Because the seeds need oxygen to germinate, they remain dormant until these coats begin to wear away. One seed invariably requires much more oxygen than the other, and so remains dormant a year longer. Thus each bur produces two generations of offspring—one reason these weeds are notoriously difficult to eradicate. Cockleburs are short-day plants, meaning they only flower when the nights are long. In

North America, cockleburs typically bloom during the fall months when the days are shorter and the nights longer. They will not bloom during the long days of summer or near a street light.

Danger

The Common Cocklebur is a native of North America that has become a noxious weed worldwide. It invades agricultural lands and can be poisonous to livestock. Some domestic animals will avoid consuming the plant if other forage is present, but less discriminating animals, such as pigs, will consume the plants and then sicken and die. Seedlings and seeds are the most toxic parts of the plants.

Uses

The plant has been used for medicinal properties and for making yellow dye. There are two other interesting uses for cockleburs. Because they readily attach to cloth material, they can be used as "darts" in a cocklebur dart game. Also, sixteen of the spiny burs can be glued together to form a perfect little poodle dog.

This information was obtained from the following sources:

<http://cocklebur.ignaut.net/>

<http://www.fortunecity.com/greenfield/clearstreets/84/intell.htm>

North American Wildflowers – A Reader's Digest Field Guide © 1998

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Information About Brentsville
Shared Among Neighbors

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