

Brentsville Neighbors



Information About Brentsville
Shared Among Neighbors
December 2006



Welcome Neighbor!

Sitting here brings to mind that famous song from Alice in Wonderland, "I'm late, I'm late for a very important date. No time to say hello, good-bye, I'm late, I'm late, I'm late..." Ah, the year has passed so quickly! And yet, there is so much to look forward to even as we look back and reminisce about the wonderful life we have lived and shared with others.

Last year we commented that Christmas is the time for our coming together with joyful voices. This year will bring special meaning to that thought. If you can, please plan on attending the Holiday Open House at the Brentsville Historic Centre that will be held on December 9, 2006, from 4:00pm until 7:30pm. Very special holiday music will be provided by the Brentsville District High School Choir in the newly restored Union Church at 5:00pm and 6:00pm. It will be so enjoyable to hear music performed in this wonderful place once again.

Merry Christmas

and a

Happy New Year!

With warmest wishes,
Nelson & Morgan

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Fun and Mischief

Childhood Memories of Brentsville, 1950's

Name: Jennings Clare Breeden
DOB: September 6, 1943
POB: Brentsville, Prince William Co., VA
Father: Morgan Henry Breeden
Mother: Olive Marye (Wolfe) Breeden

I am Jennings Clare (JC) Breeden, the third son of Morgan Henry Breeden and Olive Marye (Wolfe) Breeden. I was born on September 6, 1943, at home, in the house that daddy built on what we called Donovan Road, now named Izaak Walton Road.

Old Town Brentsville was not too much smaller then as it is now. Izaak Walton Road seems to be the only place where fields and pastures have given way to small development.

In the '50's, we did not have "organized" sports. However, we did not lack for fun. We practiced the old adage of "make do with what you have." Though we played all of the seasonal sports, my fondest memories are of summer and winter.

This was a time when a child could roam the neighborhood and his parents would not worry about his safety. It was also a time when if any adult spoke to any child, that child would listen or "get it" when he returned home. (Lack of telephones did not inhibit fast communications!)

Summers: We watched as Webster's pond was dug and then spent countless hours swimming and fishing there. We also swam and fished at 'The Ford,' 'Birdie Keys', and 'Fair's Rock' on Cedar Run, and 'the log' on Broad Run. As we aged, we also swam at 'the bridge' (the old two lane steel bridge crossing Cedar run on Rte. 619). To jump off the lower rail of this bridge was a major feat. However, to dive off the top rail was something that only time and courage could achieve.



Winters: Back to Webster's pond. We would skate all day, jumping barrels, playing ice hockey "keep away" with sticks and a can and, when darkness fell, build a fire and skate into the night.

To us, "Shorty" Braden was an over grown kid with a drivers license. Although out of the military, married, and settled down (?), Shorty was a teenager at heart. When the snows fell, and he saw us pulling our sleds along the road, he would join us at Golladay's hill (one of many places). He would help us make good sledding trails and sleigh with us until his "mommie" called him home.

Mischief: We were taught to respect other people's property and did very little destruction.

However, we did do "things" that we knew were wrong. Examples: We would climb Major Teir's fence and eat his cherry tree bare. He lived in Washington D.C. and came here only on occasional weekends. When he saw that his cherries were gone, he would go crazy, and we loved it! We would sneak into (Juan) Diaz's strawberry patch and make just enough noise for him to hear us. He would come out of the house, hollering in Spanish, and we would take off. And, Mr. (John) Donovan's watermelon patch was also a spot for an occasional raid.

All I need do is close my eyes and I can see and hear other adults of my childhood. I believed then, as I believe now, that my Uncle Wynnott Wolfe could build an airplane if given a saw, a hammer, and nails. Others are Sparky Carter, Sidney Spitzer, and two wonderful old ladies, Miss Lillie (Keys) and Miss Feenie (Molair).

In closing, it is impossible to drive through this beautiful little town and not be distracted by a thousand thoughts and memories. It is good to come home, if only for a moment.

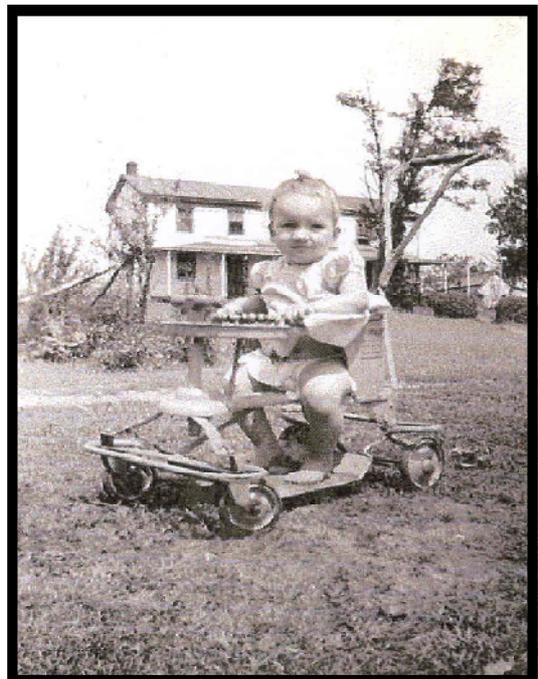


Adult male coyote caught near Brentsville
by Daniel Breeden earlier this year. Photo by Fred Wolfe.

The two pictures below are courtesy of Bill Wade



Bill Wade mowing the lawn during the Summer of
1941. The Molair home is in the background.



Barbara Wade (born August 3, 1940) with the
Molair house in the background and out buildings.
Note path from house to store.

Where WILD things live...



Persimmon tree loaded with fruit in the Tavern Lot



Bark of the tree



Ripe persimmon fruit



Persimmon seeds

Citizens at War.

The story of Brentsville's Civil War

Paul Spencer, a resident of Australia, has an unexplained love of America's Civil War History and in particular, it's impact on a little town in Virginia called Brentsville which was then the County Seat. Paul has recently completed a story that he is graciously allowing us to share with you. It will be serialized in small sections until completed. We hope you enjoy his work as we do.

Part I.

Brentsville would be little remembered today except for the fateful decision of the Prince William County (PWC) board members to move the County seat from Dumfries in the early 1820's. At the confluence of three streams, Broad Run, Cedar Run and Kettle Run, and roughly in the geographic centre of the County Brentsville became the fourth seat of the PWC government.

By 1822 a new Courthouse and Jail had been built, and the town started to expand. A description of Brentsville in 1835 is provided from the Virginia General Assembly Joseph Martin's Gazetteer - "...The Courthouse, Clerk's office and jail are handsomely situated on the main street, in a public square of 3 acres. Besides them the village contains 19 dwelling houses, 3 miscellaneous stores, 2 handsome taverns built of brick and stocked, 1 house of entertainment, 1 house of public worship, free for all denominations, a bible society, a Sunday School, a temperance and a tract society. There is in the vicinity a common school in which the rudiments of the English education are taught... population 130 people of whom 3 are attorneys and 3 regular physicians."(1) Perhaps the most prominent

house on Main Street was the White House, just across the road from the Courthouse. The population of Prince William County had declined from a peak of 12,733 in 1800 to just 8,129 in 1850. (2) In 1859 the County's population was recorded as over 5,000 whites, 2,500 slaves and 550 free Negroes. (3)

One of the great fears throughout the South was of slave insurrection. This was reinforced by John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859. Although most areas had part time squads of Virginia State Militia, additional militia companies were formed in many places after Brown's raid, including Brentsville. A Company under the command of Captain WW Thornton drilled each month. (4) A flag was provided by the young ladies of the area, including Miss Sarah Somerville Williams, the daughter of the owner of the White House. A Tournament and Ball were held in honour of the presentation. (5)

An unusual aspect of the Brentsville area was the presence of about 40 families from New Jersey, who had immigrated to the area during a population push by the County in the 1850's. These families went on the land, and resided in the area between Brentsville and Catlett's Station. Most stayed true to the Union, although the sons of one of the families later enlisted for the Confederacy. The area was known as "Jersey settlement" and sometimes "Yankee settlement."

Brentsville remained a relatively small town as the Civil War drew near, although its importance to the area should not be underestimated. Farms and plantations dotted the surrounding areas, from the 1820's onwards growing mainly corn, wheat, and a small amount of tobacco.

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Courthouse days saw the Main Street jam packed, and it was difficult to find a hitching post, or get a meal at the taverns such were the crowds.

Most of the area was pro secession, with the obvious exception being the "Jersey settlement". No doubt one of the prime movers in people's feelings was Eppa Hunton, the Commonwealth Attorney for Prince William County since 1846 and a Brentsville resident. Hunton, an avowed secessionist, also held various posts in the Virginia State Militia, including Colonel and later Brigadier General. He was sent as one of the County's voting members to the Virginia Secession Convention held in Richmond on April 17, and whilst a referendum of the people the following month was to decide the issue of secession there was little doubt as to which way the vote would go. In fact recruitment had already begun for the Confederate Service at many places including at the Brentsville Courthouse on April 23. Sixty-five that had drilled under Captain Thornton enlisted that day. This was to become Company A of the 4th Virginia Cavalry. When Virginia eventually seceded a new flag was required for the Company, and the aforementioned Miss Sarah Williams donated a silk dress, with the young ladies of the area again assisting in making it into a flag. (6)

When war did break out Eppa Hunton was appointed by the Virginia Governor as Colonel of the 8th Virginia Infantry and was "warmly commended" for his role at 1st Manassas. His brigade was also prominent at the Battle of Ball's Bluff in October. Although plagued by ill health for much of the war caused by a painful fistula that would not heal, he was to see action in most of the major engagements of the Army of Northern Virginia. (7)

Joseph Latimer was another Brentsville resident just before the War. He lived with his parents near Brentsville, and became a student at the Virginia Military Institute at Lexington in 1859.

He was head of his class at the end of his second year, and was one of the students chosen to serve as a drill instructor at the Camp of Instruction in Richmond after the war began. (8) In July 1861 when the training camps disbanded Joseph returned to Brentsville, undecided whether to return to the Institute (which was now destitute of most of the best teachers,) or to enlist when he turned eighteen. Shortly after his birthday he decided on the latter and was appointed a Lieutenant in Captain AR Courtney's Hampden Artillery. This was one of the batteries he had instructed and Courtney was his cousin. In September he was "unanimously elected" as the senior second Lieutenant of the battery, and by April 1863 was a major - though still only nineteen. He was often referred to as the "Boy Major." (9)

Due to its semi-strategic location and proximity to the northern capital, war was never going to be easy for the area around Brentsville. Up until 1864 there was constant skirmishing and scouting by both sides in the area. Every day the war must have played an enormous part in the lives of those that stayed. The War's impact on Brentsville is still being researched today and I have included information from other places in the same general area. I feel that it is reasonable to assume that much of what follows was more than likely to have also occurred in the area of Brentsville. (Continued next month)

FLASHBACK

The Manassas Journal - Brentsville News

December 14, 1923

A play and entertainment will be given at the school house tomorrow evening. A small admission fee will be charged and refreshments will be sold. The proceeds are to be used toward finishing the payments on the school piano.

Misses Elsie May and Ora Bean, who have been sick with chickenpox, are able to be out.

Paul and Howard, the children of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Cooksey, who were ill with the same disease, are very much improved.

Butchering has been the order of the day.

Mrs. Pearl Pierson, of Pennsylvania, spent a few days this week with her children, Louvenia and Franklin, at the home of Mr. J. R. Owens.

Where the WILD things grow...

Diospyros virginiana

Common Names: **American persimmon, common persimmon**

Family: **Ebenaceae** (*ebony* family)

Description:

The persimmon is a slow-growing deciduous tree, rarely exceeding 50 ft (15 m) in height. The leaves are generally elliptic, 4-6 in (10-15 cm) long, dark green on top and pale green underneath. The bark on older trunks is black and broken up into distinctive, regular square blocks. The flowers are greenish and inconspicuous, with each tree having only male (staminate) or female (pistillate) flowers, a condition called dioecious. The female lowers develop into showy orange fruits, up to 2 in (5 cm) in diameter, that are very astringent during maturation, but deliciously sweet when fully ripe. Several cultivars selected for fruit quality, seedlessness, cold hardiness and disease resistance are available.

Location:

Persimmon is native to eastern North America from New England, west to Kansas, and south to Texas and Florida. It is one of the most widely-adapted of trees, growing naturally in bottomland swamps, along stream banks, in upland forests, in fields, piney woods, and even dry scrub lands.

Features:

When you gently shake a persimmon tree, the ripe fruits fall to the ground. If you have to pull the fruit off the tree, it will surely pucker your mouth inside out! Ripe persimmons are delicious out of hand, and can be made into puddings and cakes. Frozen, they satisfy like ice cream, while dried persimmons are like dates. Persimmon wood is prized for its beauty and extreme density, and used for golf club heads and pool cues.

Folk Songs of North America frequently made reference to local plants and animals -- something everyone could relate to. The following is an abbreviated version of one such song:

Bile Dat Cabbage Down

*Bile dat cabbage down
Bake dat hoe-cake brown
Craziest song I ever heard,
Bile dat cabbage down.*

*Possum in a 'simmon tree,
Raccoon on the ground,
Raccoon says, "You son-of-a-gun,
Shake some 'simmons down!"*

*Bile dat cabbage down
Bake dat hoe-cake brown
Craziest song I ever heard,
Bile dat cabbage down.*

*So, Possum began to shake,
'simmons began to fall,
Raccoon says, "You son-of-a-gun,
I didn't want them all!"*

*Bile dat cabbage down
Bake dat hoe-cake brown
Craziest song I ever heard,
Bile dat cabbage down.*

Source: http://www.floridata.com/ref/D/diosp_v.cfm Steve Christman 02/26/98; updated 11/28/99, 2/14/03, 2/20/03, 9/4/03

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