

# Brentsville Neighbors

Preserving Brentsville's History

March 2013



CSS Merrimac



USS Monitor

The Battle at Hampton Roads, Virginia, March 8, 1862

Welcome Neighbors,

What does it mean when there are robins all over your yard; the red-winged blackbirds are at your bird feeder; the geese are splitting off into pairs; birds are looking for prospective nesting places; crocus and tiny speedwells are blooming; and there are green tips on the end of early blooming plants? These are all signs that spring can't be that far away. And I, for one, am anxious for it to get here. Not that we've had such a bad winter—it just seems that the older I get the colder I feel. Bring on Spring!

The Historic Preservation Division's presentation "Lest We Forget - The Enslavement and Emancipation Conference" with the Bus Tour of Historic Sites was a huge success. Brentsville was chosen as the location of the bus tour's stop for lunch and tours that included a very special presentation by members of the 23<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Colored Troops. Lunch was provided by Jeremiah Burns, MGySgt., USMC (Retired) of Jeremiah's Kansas City Style Barbeque consisting of hot bread, fried fish, collard greens, pulled pork and other goodies plus a mouth watering dessert, hot cherry cobbler, made by his lovely wife Sheila.

Mark your calendar to attend "Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" on March 16th at 1PM. Women held many different roles during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and specifically, during the Civil War. The women's

role in the family, society, during the war, and the hardships they faced (childbirth, lack of rights, etc.) will be discussed. Guests will also tour the farmhouse and learn about what daily life was like during the time period. \$10 per person and free for children under six. Call 703-365-7895 for details.

Very best wishes,  
Kay and Morgan



(L-R) Steward T. Henderson, 23<sup>rd</sup> United States Colored Troops, Unidentified member, Hashmel C. Turner, Jr., Chaplain, 23<sup>rd</sup> United States Colored Troops, and Louis L. Carter, Jr., QM Sgt., 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, Company B.

## This month:

- |                          |             |                   |                |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------------|----------------|
| ➤ Flashback              | page 2      | ➤ Sam's Story     | pages 4, 5 & 6 |
| ➤ Where Wild Things Live | pages 2 & 9 | ➤ When War Came   | pages 7 & 8    |
| ➤ Snippets               | page 3      | ➤ Reader Feedback | page 9         |

# Flashback

Mr. and Mrs. George Melvin of Washington, Mr. and Mrs. John Melvin of Hoadly and Mr. and Mrs. Harold Turner of Longview will be hosts at an Open House on Thursday Dec. 24 from 5pm to 7pm at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Donovan of Brentsville, in honor of the Donovan's 50th wedding anniversary. All friends and relatives are cordially invited to attend. Refreshments will be served.

Source: Brenda (Melvin) Crewe



John and Florida Donovan open gifts received for their 50th wedding anniversary, December 24, 1959.

Photo courtesy of Brenda (Melvin) Crewe.

## Where WILD things live...



*Stellaria media*  
Common Chickweed

A low, inconspicuous, European annual 3 to 8 inches tall, chickweed forms mats up to 16 inches long. Tiny, pointed, oval, untoothed leaves, 1/2 to 1 inch long, grow in pairs (they're *opposite*). A fine line of hair extends along the length of the slender, delicate stem.

Tiny white flowers 1/8 inch across, with 5 petals so deeply cleft they look like 10, distinguish chickweed from other plants (*Stellaria* means star, referring to the flower). Five green *sepals* (modified leaves) grow as long as the petals they underlie.

You can eat all the many chickweed species. Common chickweed (*S. media*) has stalked leaves (*media* means ordinary). Star chickweed's (*S. pubera*) leaves are stalkless (*pubera* means downy). Mouse-ear chickweed (*Cerastium vulgatum*) is coarsely hairy.

**FOOD USES:** Chop common and star chickweed, and add them, raw, to salads, or cook them like spinach. Mouse-ear chickweed is so



# Snippets from the County School Board Minutes (abridged)



## CALLED MEETING OF COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD.

Manassas Va Jan. 27-1925.

A called meeting of the County School Board was held at the Courthouse on Tuesday Jan. 27-1925 with the following members present: J R Cooke, Chm. Thos J Woolfenden, E S Brockett and D J Arrington. This meeting was called for the purpose of discussing with the State Architect Mr Raymond V Long, plans for a new building for Manassas High School and to discuss the advisability of asking for a bond issue for that purpose. Mr Chas R McDonald, Clerk, having been called out, on motion D J Arrington was made clerk pro tem.

The report of the survey committee for high school organization for Pr. Wm. County was submitted and read for the information of the members present. A general discussion followed but no action was taken.

On motion the board of supervisors was allowed the privilege of using the colored school building at Brentsville as a storage for tools etc. belonging to the roads of that District.

Reading of the minutes of previous meeting was postponed until next regular meeting.

The following bills were presented and allowed:

R E Fogle, wood	12.00
W S Smith, labor	20.45

D J Arrington Clk. pro tem.

# Sam's Story

By  
David "Sam" Pearson

If only today could be like the days I spent growing up in Brentsville, this note wouldn't have been so long in coming.

I often wonder why today's families can't sit down together for the evening meal, then maybe sit out in the back yard talking with friends and neighbors, while the children play ball, hide and seek, or kick the can.

I also wonder how I could recall my childhood as being so good when we lived, by today's standards, in "near primitive" conditions. We had no "inside plumbing" so the hand pump in the backyard was our water source; although the water was a bit heavy with iron (or something). The trusty old outhouse was a "safe" distance away (at least 50' -75' from the house). Our bathtub was a galvanized wash tub that served for both bathing and washing clothes. Our heating system was central – a wood stove in the center of the living room, and our fuel was supplied by three strong boys and one strong girl.

Lest you think I am complaining, let me assure you I'm not. I was happy to have a dry, warm place to live, enough clothes to wear, good food to eat (and plenty of it), and parents who cared for and loved me. (I knew many kids who didn't have these.) I suppose I could have done without the winter frost on the outhouse seat!



Maybe I am a bit prejudiced, but I felt, and still feel, that there was no better place in the world for children to grow up than the town of Brentsville. It offered every amenity a youngster could desire. You cannot leave town without crossing a stream – Cedar Run, Broad Run, Slate Run, and Kettle Run. Some were shallow, some were deep, but all offered perfect spots for fishing and swimming.

There were also abundant fields and woods for us to hunt and play. Fortunately most of the landowners were gracious enough to allow that.

When I stop to remember, my mind is flooded with so many things that I think that I could fill a book, but you don't have room for that and I don't know how to write a book.

My earliest recollection is sometime in the summer of 1948 (I think), when I was just three years old. The house on Izaak Walton Lane was almost complete and H.L., Mary, Bud, and I were upstairs watching the dozer grading around the house.

The years following were spent in countless hours of working, playing, and church. My mother began attending Hatcher's Memorial Baptist Church and we attended regularly for the remainder of our time in Brentsville.

(Continued on page 5)

We played with most of the kids around town, but the majority of the time it seems that Bud and I spent with Daniel Breeden. We built forts, killed Indians (sometimes we were Indians killing the white man), and blazed trails throughout the woodlands of Brentsville. We literally pricked our fingers, mashed our bloody fingers together, and became “blood-brothers”. Our days in the summer went something like this:

-Get up and eat a hearty breakfast

-Work the garden for a couple hours, then run to the creek to swim, fish, and explore – sometimes until lunch and sometimes until dinner time

Somewhere in all that we would get in a good ball game in the lot between Kenny Keys’ dirt lane and Daniel’s house. You know, I don’t remember one time hearing Mr. or Mrs. Breeden complain about all the kids in the neighborhood tearing up their grass or making too much noise. We also used the Steven’s field across from our home to play football.

Many a hot summer day was also spent in Webster’s pond. I don’t know how we survived the jumps and dives off of Cedar Run Bridge (it seemed like a 40’ dive, but was more like 15’ - 20’). Walking the 2” iron braces across the top of Broad Run Bridge on Lucasville Road, and in the “dog-days” of summer swimming in the scum-covered water of the pond. God is certainly gracious and protective.

All was not without trouble. We friends and “blood-brothers” would have a day or two of fighting and feuding, but it all seemed to work out – the friendships continued.

My sister Mary had a friend, Julie Webster, with whom I fell deeply in love when I was about 12. But it was never meant to be, I was

too shy to let her know and she was an older woman – by at least a year. However, I think I recovered without too much damage.

Brentsville was full of good neighbors. One day, when I was about five, my brother H.L. and some of his friends gave me a “nickel” (actually a “knockout” from an electrical box), and told me to go to the store and get some ice cream. I went into the store, placed the slug on the counter, and asked Mrs. Shoemaker for a chocolate ice cream cone. She looked at the “nickel,” looked at me, and then scooped me up a big chocolate ice cream cone. Those guys didn’t know what to say when I came out licking my ice cream. I can still remember picking up bread or something and saying to Mrs. Shoemaker, “Dad wants to know if you can put this on his tab?” I don’t remember her ever saying “No”.

Some summer nights we would sleep in the back yard under the Willow tree. Having trouble going to sleep, we would wander down to the Cedar Run Bridge to take a mid-night dip. Sometimes Daniel, Bud and I would take our homemade gigs and a light to Webster’s pond to gig frogs. We would then take our catch back to Daniel’s house and fry them up on his family’s charcoal grill. There is nothing like frog legs rolled in flour, and fried up in the middle of the night.

I could go on and on, but I hope you get the picture.

It was a sad day when we moved from Brentsville in about November of 1962, but one bright note in it all was that I met my wife at Gar-Field High. She was another manifestation of God’s wonderful grace, and remains to be after 48 years of marriage.

When I was twelve years old, as was the custom, I joined the Hatcher’s Memorial Baptist Church and was baptized. I was happy

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

that I had reached this point, and felt I was safe to spend eternity in Heaven. However, about three years later in the same church, an evangelist came for a revival meeting. He preached the truth of the Bible and I realized that I was not on my way to Heaven – that my sins had not been forgiven – so I confessed my sins that night and asked Christ to save me. So, in His great mercy and grace, He did and 50 years later I am still assured that when I leave this life, I will spend eternity in Heaven with God.

My wife, Irma, and I have been blessed with two sons, David and Michael, and two grandsons, Ryan (20) and Brandon (18).

I worked 29 years for the Prince William County Service Authority and retired from there in 2005. In the middle of my service for PWC, my family and I moved to Pensacola, FL. where my wife and I attended Pensacola Christian College. I graduated in 1983 just 20 years after graduating from high school. Soon after, we returned to VA and I was reemployed with the PW Service Authority in 1986. We located in Spotsylvania County where we built our home. We lived there for about 18 years. While there I pastored Flat Run Baptist Church in Locust Grove, VA for about 10 years – until having to retire from the Service Authority and the church because of a heart problem. Now we are enjoying retirement with our grandchildren in Chattanooga, TN.

But to get back to the subject, I have many wonderful memories of growing up in Brentsville, and every chance I get to return to VA, I make sure I visit Brentsville to keep my memories fresh.

Thank you for allowing me to share my memories with you.

David Samuel (Sam) Pearson

As most of you know by now, Sam passed away on January 11, 2013. He had started writing these memories over the last 6-7 years. Last year I asked about them and he said they were written but he typed too slowly to get them to Morgan Earle. I offered to type them when I visited this year.

What Sam didn't mention was his love of ball – softball was his first choice and he played on several teams even after having major heart surgery. In the off-season he played basketball to “stay in shape.” He won many trophies and was inducted into the Central VA Softball Hall of Fame in 1999; he was nominated to be inducted into the Senior Softball Hall of Fame in July and the Prince William Softball Hall of Fame sometime this year.

He touched many lives throughout his lifetime; on the job, on the field or court, in his family, and in his church. This fact was attested to over and over at his funeral in TN and the memorial service in VA.

Mary Pearson Pumphrey



Flat Run Baptist Church  
Organized 1849

# When WAR Came to Brentsville

POHICK CHURCH, March 6, 1862.

Brigadier General R.B. MARCY,  
Chief of Staff, Army of the Potomac:

GENERAL: I ascended at 5 this p.m. and remained up until 6 o'clock. It was calm and clear, and many of the enemy's camps were visible, and the smoke ascending straight gave a good idea of the enemy's position.

There are more smokes than usual at Fairfax Station, and a line of picket smokes extending southeast from there and nearly forming a junction with our lines running toward Springfield Station.

Heavy smokes (besides those seen in the morning) at Dumfries, Brentsville, Bradley's and Manassas. General Heintzelman was here at 2 o'clock and went up twice.

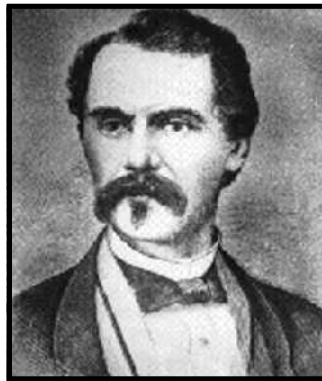
I am greatly in need of that map that I spoke about yesterday to enable me to name place and distance more correctly. The one I have is small and inaccurate.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

T.S.C. LOWE,  
Chief Aeronaut.

Thaddeus Sobieski Constantine Lowe was born in a small frame house in Coos County, New Hampshire on the 20th of April, 1832. Very early on, he exhibited an interest in science and aeronautics. In 1845, in fact, he experimented with an enormous kite, keeping a cat aloft on it overnight (and, incidentally, creating a rash of what today would be called "UFO reports" in the city of Portland, Maine). He had planned to build an even larger kite and lift himself up into the air, but finally decided that a balloon would be more useful and dedicated himself to acquiring one.

By 1856, he had saved up enough to buy his balloon. His first ascension went well and many others followed as he perfected his ballooning skills. He made plans for longer voyages, but realized he would need a larger craft for this, so took to giving rides: One dollar for short trips, five for longer ones. He was soon able to construct a larger balloon. Now he began to dream of a balloon voyage across the Atlantic. His studies of the air had convinced him that - at the proper altitude - there was a continual eastward



current of wind, moving with sufficient velocity to carry him across the ocean in a scant three days. But it would take a balloon far larger than any previously built.

With the start of the Civil War, all Lowe's TransAtlantic plans were put on hold and he instead immediately offered to form a Balloon Corps to act as observers for the Union army. A test ascension carrying aloft Lowe and a telegraph operator, connected to the ground by a half-mile long wire, sent a message to an

impressed President Lincoln. A little bit more than a month later, the twenty-nine year-old Lowe was ushered into the office of the President. There, Lincoln himself wrote the note that created the Balloon Corps.

Within the next year, Lowe had created the world's first Air Force: Building the balloons, hiring the aeronauts to fly them and creating the techniques necessary to launch the fragile craft in the middle of a war and receive signals from them. Amongst other things, Lowe created a portable gas

(Continued from page 7)

generator, so that the balloons could be filled on site, rather than the laborious prior method of filling them in the nearest town and towing them (by hand!) to the battle. Lowe also soon created a set of portable lime-lights so that filling operations could occur all through the night. The balloons soon proved their worth, following troop movements, finding hidden Confederate forces and allowing for the first time Union artillery to fire at targets it itself could not see. Lowe then built the world's first "Aircraft Carrier:" A large barge with a balloon, gas generators and everything necessary to operate as on land. It soon was proving its worth as well during the Peninsula Campaign. He also attempted to introduce aerial photography but, for reasons that have never been explained, he could not convince the military of its worth.

Making many of the ascensions himself, he soon acquired the legend "Most shot at man of the Civil War." Lowe always said that the best proof of the Balloon Corps usefulness was how much effort the Confederates put into trying to shoot them down -something they never managed to do.

But while the Corps was proving its worth, internal tensions were building up within it. To staff his force, Lowe had recruited most of the aeronauts then operating in the United States. Many felt, not unaccountably, that they rather than the young Lowe should be in charge. Dissension within the Corps was picked up by the higher-up military personnel outside of it, quite a few of which disliked the whole idea of a "Balloon Corps" for one reason or another (Lowe was constantly forced to fight for supplies, for support and occasionally just to be allowed to fly once he got to the battlefield all during the war).

One of the more vocal opponents within the Corps was John La Mountain. His continual attacks on Lowe reached such absurd levels that Lowe appealed to high command to intercede and do something about him. What they did instead was to allow La Mountain to test out his "free-balloon" theory of observation. In spite of his years of free balloon ascension, Lowe had insisted that all of the Balloon Corps flights during the Civil War be tethered, feeling, understandably, that a free flight over a battlefield added immeasurably to the dangers without providing much if any additional information (and it prevented such communication methods as telegraphs). La Mountain felt otherwise - though whether this was a calculated belief, or the simple fact that if Lowe felt they should be tethered, he should feel they should be free, is unknown.

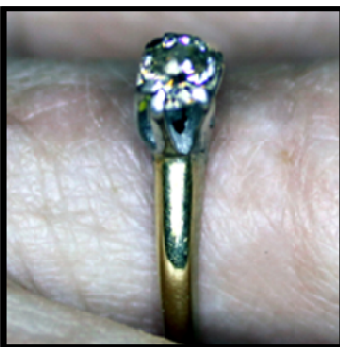
And in early 1862, he got his chance. At first, the free balloon observation flight seemed to go well. La Mountain was able to find and, by maneuvering his balloon, track a group of Confederate troops. But upon landing, the flight suddenly turned disastrous. Coming down among the forces of Union General Louis Blenker, without uniform or insignia (at this time, the Balloon Corps was still a civilian organization), he was taken to be a Confederate spy. His balloon was riddled with bullets and one of those bullets passed through the back of La Mountain's head. He died instantly. La Mountain was the only member of the Balloon Corps to be killed during the Civil War.

The death of La Mountain, while a tragedy, did result in an immediate lowering of tensions within the Corps. It also gave Lowe ammunition of his own to resume his fight to have the Balloon Corps made part of the Military. While the Corps had been working with and within the Union Army since the beginning, it had remained a "civilian" organization. Quite apart from the dangers (as shown by the death of La Mountain) of being mistaken as an enemy by their own troops, had any of the Corps been forced down in Confederate territory, their lack of any uniform would most certainly get them shot as a spy by their troops.

Lowe fought with the military hierarchy long and hard on this (years later, he said "I would rather have faced the entire Confederate Army of Northern Virginia defending Richmond, than one Union Lieutenant, defending his own small bureaucratic territory") and on the Fourth of July, 1863, Lowe's wish was finally granted as the Balloon Corps was officially attached as a branch of the Signal Corps. Lowe was given the rank of Colonel and his insignia was pinned on by President Lincoln himself.

For the Corps, things began to go a bit smoother now. For Lowe, however, things were not nearly as good. The stress of the previous three years of nearly continual fighting with Generals, compounded by a flare-up of malaria, had taken their toll of the young Colonel. On January 13th, 1864, Lowe was forced by his deteriorating health to formally resign from active duty. Command of the Corps passed to Captain Cyrus B. Comstock (who would command it until 1887) and Lowe returned to his quiet boyhood home in Jefferson, New Hampshire.

Source: T.S.C. Lowe and His Planet Airships-The Story of the Man who Mastered Flight.



Engagement ring worn by Ada Davis.  
This is the ring that was used to scratch  
her name in the window of her home in  
Brentsville.

Courtesy of Howard L. Churchill



(Continued from page 2)

hairy, you have to cook it. Chickweed gets its common name because chickens love it. Raw, it tastes like corn silk. Cooked, chickweed tastes like spinach. Include any of the species in soups and stews, but cook no more than 5 minutes to prevent overcooking. Unlike most other edibles, the stems, as well as the leaves and flowers, taste good. Cooking shrinks chickweed by  $\frac{3}{4}$ , concentrating the nutrients and compensating for whatever vitamins cooking destroys.

**NUTRITION:** Chickweed is an excellent source of vitamins A, D, B complex, C, and rutin (an accompanying flavonoid), as well as iron, calcium, potassium, phosphorus, zinc, manganese, sodium, copper, and silica.

**MEDICINAL USES:** Applied externally, finely chopped chickweed soothes irritated skin, especially when mixed with marsh mallow (*Althaea officinale*) root. It's good for cuts, minor burns, eczema, and rashes. Bandage it on the affected area by itself or mixed with clay, which adds a drying and drawing effect. Change the dressing often.

Of course, try to uncover the cause of the skin malady and work to undo it. If you continually wake up with itchy, swollen areas on your skin every morning, you may find vigorous application of a fly swatter to the surface of the mosquito that's been camping out in your bedroom to be the remedy of choice!

To make chickweed infusion, pour 1 cup of boiling water over 1/4 cup of chickweed. Cover and let steep, off the heat, for 15 to 20 minutes. Strain out the herb and drink the tea hot.

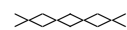
A mild diuretic, promoting the flow of urine, this beverage is also supposed to cleanse and soothe the kidneys and urinary tract and help relieve cystitis. Unlike the more powerful pharmaceutical diuretics, it won't deplete the body of minerals. It is also reputedly good for rheumatism.

Source: <http://www.wildmanstevebrill.com/Plants.Folder/Chickweed.html>

## F e e d b a c k

We love the newsletter and enjoy reading the updates on the jail. Your personal connection to the jail lends a special touch to your insights.

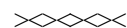
Denise and Bret Rodgers  
Manassas, Va



Thank you very much. It's so evident that you pour your heart into these excellent publications, and you deserve many accolades! I so respect what you do, Morgan, and all the care that goes into producing every story and every column. Please know your dedication is very much appreciated!!!! :)

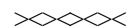
Bless you—!  
Heidi Baumstark

P.S. I download every newsletter and save them to my local drive in case I need to refer back to them! So, THANK YOU!!!!



I've really enjoyed your explanations of construction methods used in construction of the jail. You have taught me a lot. One thing's for sure: if OSHA had been in existence then, we wouldn't have a structure that has lasted nearly 200 years. Of course, the contractor would still be awaiting the permits to even begin construction. How things have changed!!

Elaine Yankey



Thank you, Morgan. The info about the bricks was well-done. I enjoyed the newsletter, as always.

The very best to you,  
Jim Harvey

*Life isn't about  
waiting for the  
storm to pass,  
it's about  
learning to dance  
in the rain!*

# **Brentsville Neighbors**

## **Preserving Brentsville's History**

**Contact us on:  
morganbreeden@aol.com  
All back issues on:**

<http://www.historicprincewilliam.org/brentsvilleneighbors/index.html>

**IN GOD WE TRUST**

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

