

# *Brentsville Neighbors*

“Preserving Brentsville’s History”

**F e b r u a r y 2 0 1 4**

Welcome Neighbors,

With issue number 100 behind us (thank you Heidi Baumstark for your wonderful story in the Observer) we can now focus on finding more information about Brentsville that we hope will be of interest to everyone.

We always knew Brentsville was a special place but the more we dig the more special it becomes. Information keeps popping up from some of the most unexpected places. That letter from the jail in last month’s edition is but one example. Now, thanks to Heather Hembrey, a whole new series of articles may be possible about Confederates who claimed to be loyal to the Union. I won’t give too much away right now but we’ll be working on these right away.

The story on page 8 of this issue is very exciting because of the prospect of finding out more about the post-war operation of the courthouse. At this point, we don’t have the proof needed to say for sure that this is the way it was and as Ron Turner stated, “I have been thinking about the brick building/clerk’s office behind the court house. As the construction of this building or addition would have been post war we should find a record in clerk’s loose papers or court minutes. There is no way the county could spend funds without a bid, appointment of commissioners, commissioners’

reports, worker accounts for payment, etc. If the county purchased a shovel or a constable issued a warrant there is record of payment. It would be hard to believe that we will not be able to find a payment for a building post war.” And he added, “ ... there is a chance we will not find another document.” But one thing is for sure, if another document IS found, we will be just as excited to pass it along.

Mark your calendar – Saturday, February 8<sup>th</sup> from 11 am until 3 pm at the Brentsville Courthouse — **Prince William County’s “12 Years a Slave.”** In 1835, William Hyden was passing his way through Prince William County during his journey from Ohio to Washington D.C. A free African-American, Hyden was arrested as a runaway slave and thrown into the jail at Brentsville. For over a year Hyden was confined to a jail cell before eventually escaping the jail and returning to freedom. Join county historians as we explore and compare William Hyden and Samuel Northup, who was recently portrayed in “12 Years A Slave”. Call 703-365-7895 for details. *\$5 per person.*

Very best wishes,  
Kay and Morgan

## **This month:**

- |                               |             |                                 |             |
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The Bradshaws had their garden plowed last Wednesday, and I hung over the back fence watching the operation. There is something sort of fascinating about the big black horses, the shiny earth rolling back under the plow, chickens pecking busily along behind, and the cutting of a nice straight furrow. It always reminds me of slicing a chocolate cake. I was so carried away by the spectacle that I engaged to have my own done, even though the ground is really a bit on the wet side. I remember how hard it was to get anything done last Spring, what with rainy weather and the last minute rush; Everybody who had a plow was using it on his own fields. The year before that I had to hire the services of two infants and a red rooster. Spring is certainly in the air; The nursery catalogues came last week, baby chicks are on order, and the neighborhood children out selling seeds already. I suppose by the time this appears we will be buried under a foot of snow, but it was nice while it lasted, wasn't it?

Oh the weather's not a topic  
 In the bright and sunny tropic,  
 For you always know just what you can expect;  
 In the winter-time, in Maine,  
 It will snow, or hail, or rain,  
 And the weather-man is treated with respect.  
 But in spite of our affection  
 For Prince William's north-east section  
 We would hereby like to register complaint:  
 You can make no calculations,  
 For the climate's variations  
 Are enough to try the patience of a saint.  
 If you plant in May, you're lost,  
 For there's apt to be a frost,  
 It's so hot in February you could fry;  
 In the midst of canning pears  
 You must stop and run upstairs  
 To drag woolens out of mothballs in July!  
 If the calendar's unseasonable  
 Don't say it is unreasonable,  
 Our local weather is a bit unique,  
 So don't pack up your galoshes  
 And dash out to plant the squashes,  
 For it's likely to be snowing in a week!

1947-02-07 The Manassas Messenger

## FLASHBACK

### DEATH OF MISS L. FEWELL

#### Former Prince William Lady Dies in Her Mississippi Home of Appoplexy Saturday.

Miss Laura Fewell, a native of this county [Brentsville] and who is so widely and favorably known here, died in her home in Jackson, Miss., on Saturday last, of appoplexy. Her illness was of only a few hours duration and her dissolution was in accordance with her oft-repeated desire to be spared a long continued suffering in her last illness.

The funeral took place on Sunday and the interment was in the cemetery at Meridian, Miss. The deceased was a daughter of the late Thos. T. Fewell, who was a brother of the late Col. W. S. Fewell, former freight agent and mayor of Manassas, and a niece of Col. John T. Leachman, of this county.

She was engaged in educational work the greater portion of her life and taught several sessions in the public and private schools of this county. She spent last winter here visiting her friends and relations, and her talent, as an interesting conversationalist, together with her charming personality and congenial characteristics made her extremely popular with those whom she came in social contact.

Source: The Manassas Journal, February 17, 1911

NOTE: See our newsletter #053, February 2010, page 6, "A Citizen of Note" for more information on Laura Fewell and a copy of one of her published works, *A Virginia Village - 1861*.

# A Boy from Brentsville Gets (Temporarily) a Farm in Africa

By Michael Simpson

Growing up in Brentsville, I didn't know much about Africa, and certainly had never heard of Namibia. Back then, it was part of South Africa; it became an independent country only in 1990. However, I recently had the opportunity to find out what it would be like to have a farm in Namibia; my wife and I responded to a request for a couple to look after a farm, which included four dogs, two cats, and two horses, while the owners were away for almost a month to attend a wedding and visit family in England. Since we love to travel, and also love animals, we thought "Why not?"

The farm is pretty remote; although it is only about 45 miles from the capital, Windhoek, most of those miles lie on a very rudimentary dirt road, so a "trip to town" is not undertaken lightly. It is almost entirely self-sufficient, with a solar-powered electric system and its own well for water. Temporarily having a farm in Africa was definitely an unusual experience, probably best described through a few of the many pictures we took.

Our daily routine started with a walk around the farm with these four dogs — a Great Dane, a Rhodesian Ridgeback, a Terrier, and a mutt.

somehow gotten themselves on opposite sides of a fence, and appeared pretty distressed by the situation. With a lot of patience, we eventually coaxed the mother camel to walk through a gate and be reunited with her baby. These next "before and after" pictures tell the story.



Before



After

We saw plenty of wildlife both during our walks and from the house. Three young kudus appeared at the horses' watering trough several times and larger groups of kudus were frequently near the house.

Other animals spotted on the farm included zebras, warthogs, meerkats, baboons, and a variety of birds. One of the most rewarding experiences though involved two camels. A nearby farm had formerly offered camel trail rides, and when that business went bust at some point, the camels became semi-wild. One morning while walking with the dogs, we noticed a mother camel with a very young baby, probably no more than two or three days old. Mother and baby had

In addition to the wildlife that we saw by just being at home, we also had opportunities to visit some of Namibia's national parks and see other animals such as the ones on the following page.

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A quasi-pet Cheetah named Lulu

And



Hippos grazing

One of the most amusing animal sightings was this golf course.



Sunset on the farm

More than 40 years ago, as a boy living on a little 10-acre farm near Brentsville and picking tomatoes for my spending money, I never imagined what a farm in Africa might be like, let alone that I'd have the opportunity to go spend a month on one. Now I know, and I am so grateful for the experience.

These springbok thought the golf course was their playground. One of the rules of the course is “Don’t hit any of the springbok” which could be a considerable challenge. There were also two non-animal highlights of having this farm in Africa. The first was the vegetation — the incredible lushness of the flowers, and a type of tree that only grows in southern Africa, the Baobab tree.



The massive Baobab tree is familiar to all readers of The Little Prince, but it has to be seen to realize how huge it really is.

The second highlight, and the last picture I’ll include, was the amazing beauty of African sunsets. Almost every day we were there, we saw a sunset beyond description.



# A Citizen of Note

## Joseph Clarence Keys

Joseph Clarence Keys, known simply as Joe to his neighbors, was born in Brentsville on September 21, 1894, to John Thomas and Catherine C. (Patton) Keys, their fourth child. He grew up in Brentsville and attended school in the little one-room building located on lot #66 at the corner of Hooe and Providence Streets, believed to be the first public school in Brentsville. During his youth he learned the trade of carpentry, practiced by many of his relatives. As was also the case of many young men from Brentsville, Joe lived in Washington, DC (part time, at least) in the pursuit of work.

Also living in Washington on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, was his first cousin, Lillie Myrtle (Keys) and her husband Elmer Landis. It was there that Joe married Miss Ora Nettie Heflin on December 27, 1921, with the service officiated by Rev. S. P. Fogle, a Brethren Church Minister from Prince William County, and little six-year-old Thelma Landis serving as the bridesmaid. Ora was born in Atoka, Fauquier County, VA on October 6, 1900, the daughter of James and Agnes (Hanback) Heflin.

Joe and Ora left Washington and moved to Marshall, Fauquier Co., VA, near the home of his bride where they started their family. Their first child, Alfred Madison Keys was born

October 21, 1922, but died less than a year later on July 13, 1923. Then on December 24, 1924, their first daughter, Mary Louise Keys was born in Rectortown.

Finally on April 18, 1925, Joe fulfilled his dream and moved back to his hometown of Brentsville where he bought a “two over two” home on one acre of land from Tracie (Spitzer) and her husband, Jesse James Whetzel for \$425.00 cash. It was in this home that Nelson Joseph Keys (February 16, 1926), Raymond Stewart Keys (April 16, 1927), Douglas Gilbert Keys, Sr. (May 25, 1929) and Virginia Amelia Keys (April 4, 1932) were born. However, after the birth of Douglas, Joe needed more land to support his growing family so on July 19, 1930, he purchased another 6½ acres of land that extended down to Cedar Run from Ervin and Annie Spitzer for \$90.00 cash money. On this land he had the typical small farm with milk cows,

a horse or two, pigs and chickens. He was a good neighbor and as such, joined with other members of the community come butchering time to share the task of putting up the meat. Normally each member had a specific device or tool necessary to do the butchering and the bringing together of these meant that there was not a lot of duplication which equals economy.

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As previously stated, Joe was a carpenter by trade, and a very good one. But when that form of work was not available he did not hesitate to do whatever was necessary to support his family. In addition to tending his small farm he always had a large garden from which his wife would “can” a wide variety of foods for winter use. For many years he worked for the county as part of the road crew and was also employed by the late Ira Cannon of Manassas, Va.

Running water was not available in the house until many years after they moved there. A hand pump was located in the kitchen by the sink that provided their drinking water. Wash water was caught in a rain barrel outside the back door. And yes, there was the typical “out house” just behind the rear of the home. Even after an indoor bathroom had been installed, Joe would always go ‘out back’ in the tradition of his younger days.

Normally Joe wore a flannel shirt that was buttoned up all the way to the top—even in the hot summer. He would smile and say that if it kept him warm in the winter it would also keep him cool in the summer. That must have been true because he never complained much about the cold or the heat. One of his simple pleasures was the production of home-made grape wine. He took a lot of pleasure in inviting his male guests into the cellar (oh yes, they had

a root cellar under the house where vegetables and the canned goods were stored) to sample his wine. It was always good. Very good! Joe didn’t drink much but he did enjoy having a sip or two with the men when they visited. Pure country hospitality.

And did I mention that he was a Democrat? Is the Pope Catholic? A standing joke in Brentsville was how do you spell Democrat? The answer – K E Y S. The two words were rather synonymous. Joe was very active in local politics. Not as a candidate for office, but as a voter registrar and most often as one of the Judges of Election. Voting took place in the Brentsville courthouse and Joe was always there

early and stayed late. He made darn sure that no one voted that was not authorized—particularly if they might vote Republican—but he was honest in that regard.

At the young age of 82 Joseph Clarence Keys, of Brentsville, died Monday, November 15, 1976, in the Manassas Manor Nursing Home. He was buried in the Robert Allen Keys Family Cemetery, Brentsville, Prince

William Co., VA, near his grandfather, father, brothers, sisters and many other family members. With his passing so passed an era. Today there are members of his family but not a single person named Keys remains in Brentsville where that name was once so prevalent.



The Keys Family, April 16, 1966. (Back) Nelson, Raymond, Joe, Ora and Douglas. (Front) Virginia and Louise.

# Featured Brentsville Building

## The Home Where Joe Keys Lived

During the late 1800's Solomon Spitzer and Richard Donovan were joint owners of virtually all of the property on both sides of the current Izaak Walton Drive extending to, and along, Cedar Run



but he may have built the 2 X 2 house and lived here because on March 14, 1918, he sold it to Edward Keys, with both parties listed as Brentsville residents, for \$300.00.

on the east and most of the land along the western side of that road back to Cedar Run again. This partnership was dissolved in 1901 with Richard Donovan taking the “bottom land” or southern half and Solomon taking the northern end which extended up to the present day Bristow Road. Over time much of both of these sections was sold off, little by little, as is witnessed by the documentation in our earlier newsletters. The parcel being discussed today is no exception.

The lot we currently describe as 12404 Bristow Road, containing approximately one acre of land, was sold to Solomon Spitzer by J. B. T. Thornton and S. P. Leachman on March 1, 1899. We are not sure where it was recorded because a specific deed book and page was not referred in the next deed and the books from that time are all hand written with the microfilm copies in such poor condition it is very difficult to read. But we do know that three years later Solomon sold the one acre lot to Thornton and Mary Champ of Prince William County (DB53 PG217) for the stated price of \$28.00. It is not clear what Champ did with the property – there is no indication that it was improved

Edward was married to Roberta Molair and they had three sons, Paul, William and Woodward. About a year later their fourth son, Robert Lester Keys, was born in this home. By October, 1923, Roberta had passed away and Edward sold the house and one acre of land to Tracie Irene Spitzer, Solomon's daughter by his second wife, Martha Mattie Jones, on October 5, 1923 (DB79 PG58). Just a short time later on November 28, 1923, Tracie married Jesse James Whetzel. They may have lived here for a short time but on April 18, 1925, Tracie sold this lot to Joseph Keys (DB80 PG481).

Joe Keys and his wife Ora lived here until first Joe and then Ora passed away and in her will, Ora left this and a second parcel to her children who on March 11, 1988, conveyed the property to Virginia and George Braden (DB1551 PG677). Their son, Barry Gene Braden, Sr. and his family lived here until they secured ownership on January 12, 2001 (2300101310010189) and they remain the current owners.

# S P E C U L A T I O N

by  
Morgan Breeden

“SPECULATION” A noun which means “*the forming of a theory or conjecture without firm evidence.*” An example might be finding a foot print in the snow and stating that it was made by a black panther. In reality, panthers are a group of large cats that includes lions, tigers, leopards and jaguars. In North America they are also called cougars or mountain lions. A black panther is simply a black color variant of a leopard, jaguar or cougar. So while an educated outdoorsman might know the track was made by a panther, to say it was a black panther is pure speculation.

So what does this have to do with Brentsville? Well, Ron Turner recently uncovered another piece of information from the Clerk’s Loose Papers as follows:

*To the Honorable Wm. E. Lipscomb judge of the County court of Prince William County that and order made of your last term appointed me commissioner in reference to the repairs of the cealing of the Court house and walls and so forth for repairs that after an examination of the same that I respectfully report to court that the cealing is in a bad condition and therefore recommend that a new cealing be put in and the walls properly repaired and white coated and the cupalow properly tined and the cealings of the jury room plastered and a floor cut and made between the 2 clerks offices connecting the two together and the 2 doors that now connect the 2 offices to the Court Rooms cased and therefore recommend that the cost will not exceed 88 dollars which is all respectfully submitted.*

*Oct 7, 1884*

*Jos B. Reid*

My initial reaction was that something must be all wrong. It has to be about the Brentsville courthouse but we know that the Clerk’s Office (building) was completely destroyed during the

war so what is Reid talking about? Suddenly a light bulb came aglow. During March 2004, the Manassas Museum provided me copies of glass negatives that were donated to them by the Paul Cooksey estate. One of these was a picture of the Brentsville Courthouse with some sort of addition on the back (see photo on following page). Several people have speculated what that addition might be but nothing seemed to fit quite right. But now this document may shed some light on that Cooksey negative that we have never been able to understand.

We know the picture was taken before 1897 when I.N.H. Beahm bought the courthouse based on the window configuration on the side of the courthouse. To give better light in his school space he added the 2nd window on either side of the door making four. The structure behind the courthouse appears to be brick with a chimney. Some suggest it was a fancy outhouse but I never thought so. An outhouse, fancy or not, would never be located that close to the courthouse and it would not likely have had a chimney like that. I also believe there was a door cut from the back wall of the courthouse that provided entry into this new structure by expanding the window. (When the plaster was stripped from the walls in October 2005 as part of the restoration process, it was clear that the bricks under the two large windows in the rear of the courthouse had been removed and then filled back in at some point.) There could just as easily have been two such doors since there were two windows. The statement in this document “... a floor cut and made between the 2 clerks offices connecting the two together and the 2 doors that now connect the 2 offices to the Court Rooms cased ... .” might tell us that since the original

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**Photo from Paul Cooksey negatives courtesy of Manassas Museum**

clerk's office (building) was destroyed during the war, that a new space was built behind the courthouse with two doors from the main courtroom into these offices. Yes, that's an awful lot of speculation but if I let my imagination run, it would seem to fit! And as Ron pointed out, "All the clerks records and cases moved to Manassas (as described in the records) would not fit in upstairs rooms of the court house. There would have to be a separate clerk's office and your photo would be a perfect place."

If all of this is true, and for now it is pure speculation, than why is this addition now gone? My guess (I don't want to over use the word speculation) is that when I.N.H. Beahm purchased the courthouse and jail and was

remodeling them to suit the needs of the Prince William Academy, he determined these rooms did not fit his needs so he had them removed. The doors going through the back wall were closed up and returned to windows. At the same time he added six new windows (two on each side and two up above those in the back of the building), extended the floor from the balcony across the length of the building, and separated the floors into classrooms. But as I've said, this is pure ... well, you know.

One thing that I love so much about Brentsville is the wealth of history surrounding our wonderful town. Uncovering something new is always exciting – even if it is the "S" word!

# **Brentsville Neighbors**

## **“Preserving Brentsville’s History”**

Contact us on:

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All back issues on:

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

**IN GOD WE TRUST**

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