

# Brentsville Neighbors

Information About Brentsville  
Shared Among Neighbors



October 2006



Welcome Neighbors,

Here we go again talking about the Brentsville Courthouse! Actually, this time we thought it would be nice to let someone else talk about it so on page two you will find two separate accounts – one describing it's origin and the other giving a 1937 perspective. We also wanted to give you a visual idea of how it looked two years ago vs. the restored elegance shown in the pictures on page three. And, we would also like to remind you of the open house on the grounds on October 14<sup>th</sup> from 11am until 8pm, hosted by the PWC Historic Preservation Division. Changes are in the air and we think you will approve!

We frequently wonder how to tell that autumn is upon us. Is it the wooly bears scurrying across the road to places unknown? Or the fields suddenly becoming alive with yellow flowers? Or perhaps the smells that seem to come alive when the nights start to get cooler? If the latter, you might have taken a walk through the woods behind the courthouse recently and caught the unmistakable smell of ripe paw paws. If you have to ask "What's a paw paw?" then you might not be as country as you thought! But not to worry—check out the information on page seven for some information about a remarkable native fruit that you may not have previously known.

If you have not taken a walk in the woods lately, we invite you to do so behind the courthouse. There are two trails being developed with a self-guided tour book for your nature walk. While these trails are rather primitive now, there have been two youths working on their Eagle Scout projects by improving the trails and we hope to see their work completed soon. But if you want to find the paw paws, you had better hurry. The raccoons love them!

Best wishes in a new publication year,

Nelson and Morgan.

## This month:

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## **Featured Brentsville Building**

### **The Prince William Courthouse at Brentsville**

### **Our 4th County Seat**

With the decline of Dumfries in the early 1800s, there was a call for the center of government to be moved once again to a place of easier access for all residents of the county. Dumfries was the third courthouse site (in use from 1762 to 1782), the first being on the south side of Occoquan Creek about 150 yards east of what is today Route 1. The second was located in the present Marine Corps Reservation about one-half mile west of the Government concrete road leading from Route 646 to Sowego and was in use from 1742 to 1760 (Ratcliffe 1978:10-11). The fourth courthouse was authorized by the General Assembly to be located on a part of the Brent Town Tract granted to Robert Bristow and escheated to the State in 1779 (Ratcliffe 1978: 12). It was placed at this location because the country on either side of Broad Run, above the confluence with Cedar Run, had become the most populous part of the County (Harrison 1987: 317). Significantly, during the early decades of the nineteenth century the Brentsville vicinity “included landowners of the largest political influence” (Harrison 1987: 371). In 1820, the General Assembly directed that fifty acres of land be laid out for a town. Trustees were appointed to manage the town business, seventy plots were platted, and three acres reserved for a public square, on which the courthouse was to be located, and three more acres reserved for a tavern (Ratcliffe 1978: 73). This courthouse was in use until 1892 when County relocated the Courthouse to Manassas.

**Historical Research and Archaeological Reconnaissance at the Brentsville Courthouse Complex, prince William County, Virginia,**  
Center for Historic Preservation, Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, Virginia  
22401-5358

The setting of the building adds much to its distinction, it sets back about fifty feet from the road, with the remains of a flag walk from the street to the door with its huge stone doorstep, over which so many feet have trod. There are still many fine trees in the yard, one especially beautiful cedar that must have looked up the scene long before this building was erected. On the right is the jail, with a stone walk that leads from the side entrance of the Court House, and if not a bridge of sighs, it must have been a sorrowful walk for those who went forth prisoners. Back of the Court House is the spot where the gibbet once stood, and to the left, on the site now occupied by a one-room school, was the office. This has been gone for many years, but the town pump remains, the only one I believe in Prince William County.

The interior of the Court House, while in need of repairs, still retains much of its dignity and beauty of the past, the woodwork is fine, and the gallery and stairway leading to it is interesting. The judge's bench is at the extreme end of the room directly opposite the front entrance.

To give a resume of Brentsville Court history, would carry one through the period when many of Prince William's prominent men were shaping their careers and the walls must have resounded with the impassioned speeches of the group of brilliant young lawyers that gathered there. It suffered much from the ravages of war, which has left the county minus many of the valuable records that were destroyed or stolen at that time. After the court was removed to Manassas, the building was used, as a school.

Research made by Susan R. Morton, Haymarket, Virginia, May 10, 1937.

# The Brentsville Courthouse Restoration 2004 - 2006



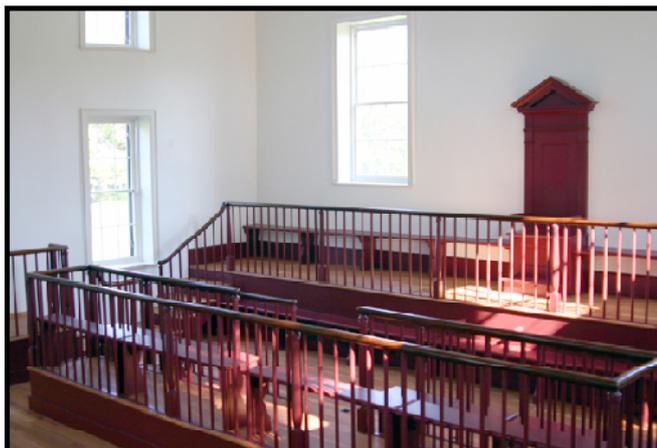
Outside view (old) 01-27-2004



Outside view (new) 08-11-2006



Inside view (old) 02-14-2004



Inside view (new) 09-28-2006

# Where WILD things live..

Read about the Paw Paw on page 6



Flower - 04-26-2006



Fruit - 09-28-2006



Photo courtesy of Nelson Keys  
Date Unknown



Smith Family Gathering  
at the Courthouse  
Date Unknown  
Photo courtesy of Fred Wolfe

# Lucy May Hartman Remembers Brentsville

I was born Lucy May Bean, the first child of Clyde and Verona Bean. I grew up on a farm with my brothers, Charles and James. I began school in Brentsville at the little white building with Miss Dorothy Woodhouse as our teacher. I attended there for the first five grades of school.

When I started school, Jim and Ben Shoemaker lived on what later was called the Moor Green Farm. They came by my house and I went to school with them. We walked to school and had to cross Broad Run on the swinging bridge. John Troy and Hazel Counts also walked with us. I remember sometimes the boys would make the bridge sway as we were going across and I didn't like that. The bridge was below where the car bridge is now and there were steps to climb to get up to the three board wide bridge and there was a cable of some kind that we could hold on to as we went across. Cars had to ford the stream and they crossed above where the bridge is now.

Hazel's grandmother lived on the way and in the evening she would stop there for something to snack on. I would stop with her. I remember eating crackers and peanut butter before we continued on home.

After the fifth grade we went to Bennett School in Manassas and rode a small bus that we called the "cheese box." The roads were not good and often in winter we would get stuck in the mud and be late for school. Frank Harris was our bus driver for several years. He lived down near Canova. I did not complete high school because when I was in the third year of high school the health check-up that was given at the beginning of each school year showed a problem with what was thought to be a spot on my lung – Tuberculosis. I was sent away to Charlottesville to a Sanatorium for treatment. This was the first time I lived away from home. I had to go in November of 1942, a day or two after my sister was born and I was there when Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japs. I continued school there. There were five of us in school. It was taught by a patient who also was being treated for tuberculosis. I remained there until February

1943, long enough for more tests to be run and it was determined what was thought to have been a spot was really scar tissue from a bout with pneumonia I had had earlier in life. I never got to go back to school, the country was at war and I married in that year. I was able to get my high school diploma by taking a GED test in 1963.



During the 1930's the country was training the military. The Marine Corps rented two of my father's fields and brought in lots of Marines who lived in tents and did maneuvers in our area. We met and made friends with many of them. I remember some of them would come to my Grandfather's house to visit in the evenings. One of them would bring a jug and make music on it while others played other things, a saw, a jews harp and one played a trumpet.

A year or two before they camped in our fields there were maneuvers over in the Aden area. My dad found that they were marching up the roads in that area and that their kitchens had not kept up with them so he went to the store, bought bread and sandwich fixings and we prepared sandwiches, wrapped them and went down the road selling them food.

During the early years of the war a lot of local persons did Civil Defense work by watching for enemy planes. A small building was built over on the hill near where Jimmy Shoemaker's house is and we all took scheduled turns watching for planes and then calling in to report info about what we saw. I remember how helpful this was to me in one instance.

I had gone on a trip to Roanoke and came back by train. The train came into Manassas about 11:30 P.M. and my family was not aware of my needing a ride home. In those days only one phone was in our house and it was on the wall in the kitchen. Everyone had gone to bed and could not hear it ringing so I called the 'watch station' which was manned 24/7 and someone from there came over to my house to wake them up to come get me. I still have my armband showing I was a watcher!

# Where WILD Things Live

## PAWPAW

### *Annonaceae Asimina triloba*

**Common Name:** Pawpaw, Paw Paw, Papaw, Poor Man's Banana, Hoosier Banana, etc.

**Related species:** There are eight *Asimina* species grow in the southeastern United States.

**Origin:** The pawpaw is native to the temperate woodlands of the eastern U.S. The American Indian is credited with spreading the pawpaw across the eastern U.S. to eastern Kansas and Texas, and from the Great Lakes almost to the Gulf. Fossils prove the pawpaw is indigenous to the U.S.

**Growth Habit:** The pawpaw is a deciduous, often narrowly conical tree growing from about 12 feet to around 20 feet. Pawpaw trees are prone to producing root suckers a few feet from the trunk. When these are permitted to grow, the single-clone pawpaw patch comes into being. The prevailing experiences of many individuals is that the pawpaw is a slow grower, particularly when it is young. However, under optimal greenhouse conditions, including photo-period extension light of approximately 16 hours, top growth of up to 5 feet can be attained in three months.

**Foliage:** The dark green, obovate-oblong, drooping leaves grow up to 12 inches long, giving the pawpaw an interesting tropical appearance. The leaves turn yellow and begin to fall in mid-autumn and leaf out again in late spring after the tree has bloomed. As late as the early 1900's, fishermen in the Ohio valley were using strips of the inner bark for stringing fish. They likely learned this use from the Indians, who used these bark strips to make fabric and nets.

**Flowers:** Dormant, velvety, dark brown flower buds develop in the axils of the previous years' leaves. They produce maroon, upside-down flowers up to 2 inches across. The normal bloom period consists of about 6 weeks during March to May depending on variety, latitude and climatic conditions. The blossom consists of 2 whorls of 3 petals each, and the calyx has 3 sepals. Each flower contains several ovaries which explains why a single flower can produce multiple fruits.

**Fruit:** The pawpaw is the largest edible fruit native to America. Individual fruits weigh 5 to 16 ounces

and are 3 to 6 inches in length. The larger sizes will appear plump, similar to the mango. The fruit usually has 10 to 14 seeds in two rows. The brownish to blackish seeds are shaped like lima beans, with a length of 1/2 to 1-1/2 inches. Pawpaw fruits often occur as clusters of up to nine individual fruits. The ripe fruit is soft and thin skinned.

**Pests and diseases:** Pawpaw trees are relatively disease free, including a resistance to Oak Root Fungus (*Armillaria*). A number of vertebrates such as foxes, opossums, squirrels and raccoons will eat the fruit, although deer, goats and rabbits will not eat the leaves or twigs. The Zebra Swallowtail butterfly's larvae feed exclusively on young, pawpaw foliage, but never in great numbers.

**Pollination:** Poor pollination has always plagued the pawpaw in nature, and the problem has followed them into domestication. Pawpaw flowers are perfect, in that they have both male and female reproduction parts, but they are not self-pollinating. The flowers are also protogynous, i.e., the female stigma matures and is no longer receptive when the male pollen is shed. In addition pawpaws are self-incompatible, requiring cross pollination from another unrelated pawpaw tree. Bees show no interest in pawpaw flowers. The task of pollenization is left to unenthusiastic species of flies and beetles.

**Harvest:** Pawpaw fruit ripens during a four-week period between mid August and into October, depending on various factors. When ripe, it is soft and yields easily to a gentle squeeze, and has a pronounced perfumed fragrance. The skin of the green fruit usually lightens in color as it ripens and often develops blackish splotches which do not affect the flavor or edibility. The yellow flesh is custard like and highly nutritious. The best fruit has a complex, tropical flavor unlike any other temperate zone fruit. At present, the primary use of pawpaws is for fresh eating out of hand. The ripe fruit is very perishable with a shelf life of 2 or 3 days, but will keep up to 3 weeks if it is refrigerated at 40° - 45° F.

Source: <http://www.crfg.org/pubs/ff/pawpaw.html>  
<http://www.fred.net/kathy/pawpaws.html>

# Flashback

When General Lee learned of the departure of two of our Army Corps, he put his troops in motion to turn our right flank and rear. This was the beginning of a campaign of manoeuvres between Generals Meade and Lee, like the moves in a game of chess. We crossed the Rappahannock and for about two weeks we marched and counter-marched along the familiar line of the Orange and Alexandria railroad, the supply trains along with the troops, until by forced marching we reached Centreville ahead of the enemy, where General Meade offered battle. General Lee retreated, however, south of the Rappahannock, destroying the railroad and burning the stations from Bristoe to the Rappahannock.

For some days we were prevented from following him by a heavy rainstorm which made Bull Run unfordable and pontoons had to be sent for. During these marches in the latter part of September, 1863, we passed one morning through the almost deserted small town of Brentsville, the county-seat of Prince William County, Virginia. The street in front of the court house was littered with books or records and bundles of papers which had been maliciously thrown out through the open door and windows, probably by some of our stragglers, or “coffee-coolers,” as they were also called. I dismounted and examined some of the books which I found to contain mainly records of wills and transfers of property. Some of these books and papers were being carried off by passing soldiers who, when they examined them at the next halt, either threw them away or built fires with them. I picked up a few bundles of papers and carried them with me until I got to camp, where I examined them. The greater part of them proved to be written consents from masters for his slaves, “Caesar and Dinah” or “Rastus and Lucy” to get married. No surnames seemed to be

used for the slaves. Among the papers there was one, however, which interested me and is still in my possession. It is a writ for the arrest of William Murphy, as follows:

George the second by the grace of God of great Britain, France & Ireland, King Defender of the Faith & .c. To the sheriff of the County of *Prince William* Greeting. We command You that You take *William Murphy* . . . . . if he be found within your Bailivic and *him* safely keep so that you have *his* Bodys before our H Justices of our said County at the Court house of the said County on the *fourth Monday* . . in . . *July* . . . . next to answer . . . . *Benjamin Grayson Gent of a plea of Trespass upon the Case, Damage ten pounds* . . . . and have then there this writ witness Peter Wagener Clerk of our said Court at the Court house of aforesaid the *XXIII* . . . . day of *June* in the *XXVIth* year of our reign 1752.

P. Wagener.

On the reverse side of the paper is this endorsement:

Not to be found within my Precinct.

John Crump

This paper, yellow with age but well preserved, is five by six inches in size. It is a coarsely executed pen blank with the words in italics inserted in fine clear penmanship. John Crump’s endorsement is written in a good plain running hand.

Source: Ten Years in the Ranks U.S. Army by AUGUSTUS MEYERS, pages 303 – 306. The Stirling Press, 1914. Reprint Edition 1979 by Amo Press, Inc. Reprinted from a copy in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Library. A copy of these pages were graciously provided by Mr. James Owens.

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