

Brentsville Neighbors

“Preserving Brentsville’s History”

January 2014

WE’RE 100!

Months old, that is. Welcome to our 100th issue of Brentsville Neighbors!

We were hoping to have something special for this issue and we believe that’s just the case. I think it was said in an earlier issue that nothing beats hard work except pure dumb luck. In our effort to find and preserve the history of Brentsville we are always digging through newspapers and Internet resources. This includes occasionally buying an old letter or other bit of information when found on eBay or other dealer outlets. Such was the case recently when a letter from Brentsville was offered for sale on eBay. Not much information was given about it other than it was posted from here during December 1848. Thinking this might give some clues about the pre-war environment we did not hesitate to purchase the letter. Once received, however, we soon realized that it would be impossible for me to transcribe it because of the style of handwriting. Fortunately Ron Turner agreed to look it over to see what he might be able to accomplish.

Ron and his wife, Marilyn, worked as a team, each making an independent transcript and then comparing the two and resolving any differences that might result. I have no idea how many hours they worked on transcribing this letter but Ron did confess that it was much harder than he expected. They were finally able to finish it and Ron offered the following: “Your letter appears to be the last in a series of letters written by an inmate in the Brentsville jail to his mother. I’m sure the earlier ones told more details as to why he was there. He did not repeat much in this letter but was surely frustrated with his mother not

answering the previous letters. To understand this letter you would need to see one or more of the other 4 letters he sent to Dear Mother. The transcription is typed line by line with no punctuation added.” [I’ve combined lines to make it fit the newsletter format better but have not added missing punctuation.]

As far as we can determine, this is the first and only known letter actually written by a prisoner in the Brentsville jail. While we don’t know why Mr. Hays was in jail, it is easy to feel his frustration at being there with the possibility of getting out growing smaller with each unanswered letter. Words cannot adequately express our gratitude to Ron and Marilyn Turner for bringing this piece of Brentsville history to life.

It is also wonderful to have memories recounted by two of Brentsville’s own, Lance and Juliet Webster. Their memories reflect those of many of our other contributors although every one is as much different as it is similar. I think that’s what makes this such a wonderful place.

And thanks to Rob Orrison for bringing us up to date on the jail restoration. I’ve learned that the entire \$17,000 matching funds were met which makes us \$34,000 closer to having another historical show-piece in Brentsville.

And how could we not be sad to see Amy Shiflett moving on to work other locations. But we know the people who frequent Ben Lomond will be just as sad to see Bill Backus leaving for Brentsville so we welcome him and look forward to his work here.

Very best wishes,
Kay and Morgan



This month:

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|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| ➤ Letter From Brentsville | page 2 | ➤ A Letter From the Jail | pages 6 & 7 |
| ➤ Brentsville Memories | pages 3 & 8 | ➤ A Note From Amy | page 8 |
| ➤ The Pond | page 4 | ➤ Reader Feedback | page 9 |
| ➤ Interpreting 200 Years | page 5 | | |



To those readers who have turned to this column expecting to see the usual, “very truly yours, Agnes Webster”, I must give warning. That great American sport exchange – presents – and – look – for – after – Xmas-bargains – rush,” (Beside which football and ice hockey are but mild parlour games) HAS TAKEN IT’S TOLL, AND Mrs. A. W. is among the missing in this week’s Messenger. Your correspondent for this edition is that much-maligned (in this column) character—her husband. Time was when I was an individual named Nick Webster, nominally master of the house; but, since Mrs. W’s literary activities, I am fast becoming known as “that writer woman’s husband”! Today, however I am getting my revenge. At least I won’t get burned toast for breakfast for the three days before the paper goes to press, AND maybe I can get near the telephone for the first time since these columns started appearing!

Of course the real reason I’m writing this today is so that she won’t be fired for not getting her copy in—I’m no fool. How can I retire and live off her literary income if that income is cut off because she gets lost in Hecht’s Department Store for three days.

As anyone knows, Washington is just an hour’s drive from this vicinity, but if you were to look in on our place when my wife is planning that simple trip, you would be convinced that you were viewing a combination of an expedition to the South Pole with Admiral Byrd and a very busy day at Grand Central Station. First, each piece of wearing apparel is laid out the night before. The next morning the selection seems all wrong and a complete change is affected. Every hat in the closet is tried on and frowned and “hummed” at.

Of course the children are a great help at times like these. As Mother attempts the change from country slacks to city ensemble the conversation goes something like this:

OUR LITTLE BOY (Age 4): “You know that chewing gum you gave me?”

MOTHER (Absently): “Yes, Dear.”

OUR LITTLE BOY: “I chewed it and I didn’t swallow it.”

MOTHER (looking for left stocking) That’s a good little boy, you mustn’t swallow it.

OUR L. B.: I DIDN’T swallow it mother . . . You know what?”

MOTHER (looking for right hand glove): “No, Dear, What?”

OUR L. B.: “I gave it to Baby Sister and SHE swallowed it!”

At the last minute the original outfit is donned after all and a streak of feminine sartorial confusion dashes thru the front door. The finer points of make-up, buttons, and hair-wisps are achieved enroute on the bus. Put Washington during Christmas Season at the other end of that bus line and you can readily see why A. Webster is not with you today.

Endeavoring to fill the breach, may I offer you the following:

The Peterson’s had a real Christmas celebration with 26 members of the family present. What a dinner to cook! Anyway there were plenty on hand to help with the dishes.

Mrs. Ray Hedrick entertained her Sunday School class with a Christmas Party, Friday evening, December 27th.

Charles Bean, son of J. C. Bean, has been discharged from the Navy and is home again greeting old friends.

Cpl. T. L. Newton was home on leave for Christmas. He is stationed at Andrews Field. The Newton’s are welcome newcomers to Brentsville, and we hope they like their new home. Mrs. Newton teaches at the Nokesville School. According to my boy who is in her class, she is, “a real good teacher—for a teacher.”

Of course the main visitor to Brentsville last week was that round, merry gentleman with the red suit and long white whiskers. As usual, he ops the news and steals the show.

See you next year,
Nick Webster

January 3, 1947, The Manassas Messenger



BRENTSVILLE MEMORIES 1943 – 1956

By
DeLancey (Lance) Webster

I was born in February, 1943, in Washington, D.C. I don't remember the event, but I'm told it was uneventful. As soon as my mother, Agnes Webster, could leave the hospital she took me back to her home — "The White House" in Brentsville.

She and her husband, Nick, had bought the old run down house two years earlier, and moved in after six months of back-and-budget breaking restoration. Along with them were Agnes' mother Katherine ("Mimi") and her son by her first marriage, Gill Machen.

Her husband busied himself with work as a filmmaker – of Army training films during the Second World War, and for the U.S. Department of Agriculture after the war. Much as he loved "The White House," and his family, he was an adventurer. His travels took him to Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, Georgia, the mid-west, and more.

Agnes was a homebody. She surrounded herself with her late father's paintings, books and collections of odds and ends, and busied herself with gardening and milking the cow and tending the pigs, goat and chickens. Later she took on the task of reporting on Brentsville happenings in the Manassas Messenger newspaper – which gave her the opportunity to practice her creative writing skills, and which solidified friendships with everyone in the community.

When I was two, my sister Julie was born. We played a lot together, but squabbled too, as siblings do. My earliest memories are of us swinging on a giant tire hung from a tree limb, swimming in Cedar Run, and later in the pond my father created behind The White House, of pushing a hand lawn mower around nearly an acre of grass and mowing neighbors lawns for spending money, and of endlessly plodding barefoot down the gravel road to the grocery store for a quart of milk and some eggs. Although our house was big with lots of land, money was often tight. Thankfully the little store extended credit for the basics.

My playmates were mostly the Breeden boys, Morgan Earle (this publication's editor) and his brother

Jennings, Homer Pearson, Donald Carter, George and Corky Powell, and Alvin Yarger. I also remember making treasure maps leading to buried treasure in our garden. I put them in the toaster to make them look aged, then gave them to my friends and told them we found them in our old house. When no treasure was found, I'd later use the holes they dug to bury the garbage. That trick lasted only a couple of times!

I remember playing in haylofts at the Powells, and biking to Manassas with Alvin Yarger to Saturday matinees at the Manassas movie theater. When we wanted our playmates to stay for dinner, Mother always said, "No problem. We'll just put another cup of water in the soup."

I remember hours spent imagining myself a baseball player, tossing road pebbles into the air in front of the house and batting them into the empty field across the road. I remember trekking through the woods behind our house to the run for a swim.



The young pine trees we planted

I remember my older brother Gill Machen practicing in an upstairs room with his country and western band...fiddles, guitars, sometimes a banjo....and endless foot-tapping. To this day there's a crack across the ceiling of the room below!

(Continued on page 8)



The Pond

By Julie Webster

There WAS no farm pond in Brentsville in 1954. Resident Nick Webster, who had grown up on the Pacific Ocean in Los Angeles, had a vision to turn a part of his back field by the woods into a pond...after all it was already a wet area to walk thru.

Next thing you knew bulldozers appeared to dig out a pond shaped indentation. We wondered where the water to fill the pond was going to come from when we discovered there was an underground stream beneath the marshy terrain.

The spring rains came and slowly the pond filled up with drops from the sky and underground tricklings. We waited and waited to swim in it. Months passed before we could recognize it as a pond and not a giant mud hole. Thanks to the wildlife department fish were allowed to make it their new home, mainly bass. After many hopeful wishes from us and many 'not yet's' from our Mother, at last we enjoyed swimming in our own pond.

My mother let us go to swim in our pond by ourselves that is...without her! She said she'd be down later to check on us. It was one of those hot sultry Virginia days early in August when if you sat in a plastic webbed lawn chair for more than a minute the chair would stick to your bottom when you got up.

The clouds were low and the air was humid. The tiny black gnats that flew around your eyes and buzzed into your ears were attempting to get in your mouth if you dared to keep it open. All the more reason to go swimming as they didn't seem to venture out over the water. Jacques, our shaggy black standard poodle was all ready to go. But then he was ALWAYS ready for a swim.

Laden with a towel and a too-big-to-carry inner tube, we trudged across the yard watching out not to step on the bumble bees which loved the sweet clover. We passed the cherry trees... no picking today! We passed the apple trees and noticed the yellow jackets. They dined on squished apples and we were glad mother had made us wear our plastic flip flops because today the bees were out in full force.

A white fence separated the lawn from the field. It was tricky to navigate when you were in a hurry with things in your hands. We hurled the tubes OVER the fence and carefully climbed thru its white wooden

boards. Jacques watched us struggling and then decided to crawl under.

Lance and I raced each other to the pond. I was two years younger than my brother and my legs were shorter but that didn't stop me from taking on the challenge. I ran down the hill thru the fields as fast as I could trying to remember where the pot holes and gullies were. By now they were covered by tall grass and impossible to see.

As we ran grasshoppers flew up in all directions and disappeared. The dog bounced up and down, vanishing beneath the tall grass. His ears flopped as he followed our direction. My breathless plea of "Wait for me" was not heard since by now I was far behind. The 'hot to the touch' inner tube banged and bounced against my body as if trying to escape my clutches. I was annoyed. It encumbered my running style. Trying to keep my flip flops on was no easy task either.

Ok, he won...but he IS older and taller. Who cares anyway...we're here and now what? First thing is to find a place to enter the pond that is not too squishy. The deep side or the shallow side? Good!...no one else was here yet...we were the first. Our neighbors and best friends, Morgan Earle and his younger brother Jennings, would show up soon. Then the fun would begin. As of now the MOST fun was had by Jacques. Not paying the slightest attention to us he carefully eased himself into the shallow end where we were with his nose just showing above the water. With black curly fur on top of his head he resembled a seal. His quiet dog paddling gave the impression that he was sneaking up on an unsuspecting log.

Flip flops off we could now feel the grassy marsh and the cool water that engulfed our feet. The clear greenish brown water became murky and the red clay mud felt like velvet between our toes. Gently, so as to not stir up the mud, we slithered into the water like the movements of a snake enjoying a silent swim.

A short time later the boys arrived and made a beeline for the homemade pier. They dove off of it into the pond, whooping and shouting yelps of joy. Cannon balls were endless. With my brother we all found things about which to wonder. Things in the water, things on the bank and things about each other. Many neighbors spent countless hours of joy, play and friendship in the Webster's pond.



Interpreting 200 Years of the Brentsville Jail

By Robert Orrison
Historic Site Operations Supervisor

As the masonry restoration project comes to a close on the historic Brentsville Jail, work will begin soon on the mechanical systems (heating and air conditioning) and the interior structure. While engineers plan out the mechanical systems, interior walls and wood working, Historic Preservation site staff begin to look at the interpretation of the Jail. This involves defining the scope of interpretation, themes to be covered and eventually the exhibits and layout of the spaces inside. Now that we have a good idea for where things structurally will be located, we can plan these finishing touches.

Much like the site itself, we want the Jail to tell the story of Brentsville throughout its history. Each room inside will have a focus and some will be very engaging and hands on. Some of the themes we will be focusing on include: history of Brentsville as a town, 19th century crime and punishment, historic architecture and building techniques, Civil War, African American and slavery and the 20th century uses of the Jail. One room will be an orientation room, covering all the above facets and orientating visitors to the general history of the Jail, Brentsville and Prince William County. Another room will serve as a recreated Jailors living quarters/office space complete with reproduction furnishings as we believe it to be furnished in the early 19th century. The hallway may have a larger timeline along the walls to show the timeline of the Jail's history and how it fits into Prince William County's

history and American history. Also, stairs leading upstairs will be located here. In one of the old jail cells on the first floor we will recreate a furnished 19th century jail cell and the other room will serve as a hands on architectural room. This room will cater to "kids of all ages" with various hands on tools to talk about how carpenters, masons and laborers built the Jail. Upstairs will have rooms focusing on the story of the Free Blacks and slaves that were imprisoned here, a room focusing on the use of the building as a dormitory for the school that was located in the Courthouse in the early 20th century and finally a room focusing on the Jail being used as a residence.

With these general themes in concepts in mind, we will be bidding out the exhibit design, fabrication and installation to professional exhibit companies. These themes are broad enough for us to change as more research is conducted and ideas come to light. We hope that some of the exhibit design companies may share their expertise and provide some new ideas and innovative ways to tell the story of the Jail. This will be a long and well thought out process, we want the Brentsville Jail to be a place that will bring visitors from all over. With proper planning and thought, the Jail will be the crowning jewel of the hard work the community and County have invested into the Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre.

A Letter From the Brentsville Jail

[Envelope]

Brentsville Va

Decem 16

Mrs Sarah E? Hays

Little Hock Hocking

Washington Co

Ohio

The Post master at Hock Hocking will please without fail of Mrs Hays has re moved forward this and all sent from here (to?) me directly if you please send it removed (—) immediately

[PAGE 1]

My dear mother Brentsville Dec 15 48

I again am so unhappy about you and my own situation in jail prompts me to write to you again dear mother I fear something has happened to you all why do you not write me a few lines what has become of you all its been two months since you wrote to me and I have not heard since they tell me here that al letters reaches you in 4 or 5 days my dear mother I exceedingly regret that the powers you sent me would not be received by judge Scott as he said the clerk did not acknowledge on the powers the appearance of Han Lewelen in Court and the name of the Clerk's office was not upon them and Clerk's Seal was not right the business dear mother is closed tell Han by me staying in jail not giving up the judge decreed the money to us in the terms that the Legal papers was to be produced di- rectly executed in some Court house I know it is very troublesome to you all but dear mother I cant help it I could not force the judge so it's the last trouble you all will have if done in a court house Han Lewelen appear in Court and both sign the power to Charlottesville here and the specific power I can get the money

and out jail so all three of you go to Parkersburg as that is in this state and then they executed according as the Va Laws re- quire then all will forever be done in this money

[PAGE 2]

my dear mother tell Han and Lewellen I have before told the necessity of these papers to get the money out of the creditors hands and that the prosecution of the business in all the estate court be done without them all that can be done against you all is done here you knew that my dear mother I send a power attorney written by a Lawyer directly after the superior Court and sent it directed to little Hock Hocking and for Lewelen Copy one by it for Ch- arlottesville also copy my specific power all are obliged to be done to get the money and don't keep me waiting here no longer or you all lose all cant dear mother you all get Parkersburg as nearest and in Va its not obliged to be Superior Court but any Court in public Court house will do to execute the powers I have never got a cent nor Cant get it no where without those powers Grimes is trying in Charlottesville but I'll defent him if I can get the papers tell Han Lew begin nothing send me the powers attorney I sent him and the article agreement I'll get all no danger if do us I tell you my dear mother I want to get the money to come to you all and have the ability to make you all happy I know you must of been sick or something happened or you would not of cruelly withheld writing to me dear mother you don't know the unsurety that your long silence impress in me you knowing my distress will take time to write me this is 5 letters and no reply oh make haste and write me dear mother and send the powers so I may get the money and come out not keep separated let me know how long it takes my letter to go to you I could

[PAGE 3]

if I had the power got the money from Purcell even or so tell Han Lew to send them if they even want there money tell him you are getting on I am miserably situated I want see you all so bad when these papers are done there will be no more trou-ble I cant sell the Land Dumfries (sold?) Taxes and had possession so long I got a Lawyer in Kentucky my that Maria D Ewell lives there with her son and her estate is very good for the administrator of Charles Ewell yet that in time I found (—) where she lives and got a Lawyer to sue her tell Lewelen (—) Han I seen a gentleman that said Purcell had drawn money from him of the (Harrison?) estate and that Purcell produced Han and Lewelens signatures but this man said that he knew that it was not his hand write tell Han that if she has not concurred with Lewelen in her third of his estate she is of course on if she hurries she can prove that she was under age when she done so she could sue Purcell and get it back give me the powers to that and I make him (prove?) at (?) it I want poor han to have all her own and her right in her husbands too to make all comfortable and poor little children as to Lewelen if he obliged Purcell his in-terest in that Wilmer Suit in Fauquier and if Han (con—)ed with him that (suing?) (decided?) and (M——) (p——) got (——) Large amount (?) Hays too purcell all Lewelens I be —lieve? Purcell has cheated Lewelen they can consider on it and make Purcell (sweat???) I believe poor han has been cheated let me know if she was under age when she assigned in her hus-bands estate Send those powers and its not not necessary for a refunding Bond my dear mother tell Han Lew to go to Court the nearest no matter if monthly Court and get

[PAGE 4]

these powers executed and send it directly or kill me by keeping me here longer I am doing all I can to leave you ever remembering my life to

do so oh my mother were it not for the deepest solicitude for you and Han I would not suffer so much I'll serve you though it cost me my life I cant find room to tell you all I want to see you to share your fire though in a decent I am struggling to get you all rights an suffer imprisonment to (grave??) for you if I die it be in your defence I cant sleep by this agony of you dear mother purcell told me he'd take my life if he could I care not for myself so you was comfortable oh any dear mother take care of your health don't run any risks and when these three powers and the article agreement signed then you all will have no more trouble may god bless and take care of you my dear mother and sister her little children all the relatives I care for is you and poor Han and am trying through the mercy of god to get all I can for you all god knows the hearts of all knows the sincerity of mine I wish I could get you all (50=000?) write me if it even tell me if anything happens if you suffer my dear mother and Han I want to see you all so bad I am getting along in the estate god bless all F? E? Hays

The Jail Cell

*Brentsville Courthouse Historic Center,
Brentsville, VA*

The jail cell. Claw marks
in cemented walls, cold air.
They think it's the ghosts.

Katherine Gotthardt
2009

(Continued from page 3)

I remember helping my father plant pine trees on the red clay hills behind our house – and game warden Walter Flory pointing out that we’d planted them all upside down. They grew anyway.

And we dragged branches to fill in gullies. And we planted kudzu to cover up the red clay and gullies. In short order the kudzu engulfed the pine trees.



The kudzu eventually covered everything killing the plants on which it grew.

And I remember starting a two page weekly mimeographed Brentsville newspaper with my friend Morgan Earle Breeden. We were 13. We sold ads to the two local stores, and had upwards of 60 subscribers, including someone’s relative in Illinois, and President Eisenhower. (I don’t think he was an actual subscriber – we just sent him a copy of every issue so he could keep tabs on what was happening in Brentsville.) He did send us a ‘thank you’ letter, if memory serves.

It was an earlier, more relaxed time. So many fond memories. I come back for a couple of days every year – to visit old friends, and to walk through the fields and woods. To visit the many years of childhood memories in The White House – the creak of the stair treads, the rustle of tree branches across the tin roof, the rooms which now look smaller than they did to a toddler. Though many of the trees have changed, in the yard behind as well as inside The White House, as well as walking to the store and on the grounds of the Courthouse, and down Izaak Walton Lane, it’s still possible to kindle fond memories of 50 and 60 years ago.

Dear Brentsville Friends and Neighbors,

Starting in mid-January, I will now be working at both Ben Lomond Historic Site and Bristoe Battlefield Heritage Park. With this said, I’d like to reflect back on my time at Brentsville and many fond memories with the community.



This past year the events and programs were such a great success not only for the site but for the community, and I know that in the upcoming year they will only get better. Highlights in my memory include the historic baseball game, the bluegrass concert, and our annual farm tour days. Not to mention the holiday concerts from the Brentsville District High School Choir. These events would not have been the successes they were without the help from the community. I truly can’t thank you all enough.

Brentsville has become a second home to me. The community has graciously “adopted” me and I am forever grateful. Every person here has made an impact on my life which I will never forget.

I could go on forever, but Morgan might have a cow because I’m hogging his newsletter, so I’ll wrap this up!

Thank you everyone for a wonderful time here at Brentsville.

I may be moving on to another opportunity, but I will visit and I DO expect phone calls and emails. You know your day isn’t complete without somehow giving me a hard time!

Thank you Morgan, Kay, Daniel, Candy, Freddy, Cary, Gladys, David, Steve, Inger, Lisa, Frankie, Butch, and everyone in the Brentsville community both near and far.

Sincerely,
Amy

F e e d b a c k

Note: During the past month we have received so many expressions of support and such kind words about the newsletter that we decided to simply use some of the comments without identifying the person. To each and every one of you our most sincere thanks!

So interesting as always. Thank you for the gift you give us each month!

Please know what a WONDERFUL service you're providing by publishing these fantastic newsletters. You and Kay are certainly MAKING history as you TELL the area's history. Bless you both for your kind hearts to keep the stories of Brentsville alive!

Thank you for all of your dedicated work in preserving and enriching the history of Prince William County.

Thanks for all you do to help keep our wider community connected.

Thank you for all the great work you do for the community. I find your newsletter to be informative, newsy and relevant.

We really enjoy the newsletter. Thank you so much for all your hard work and time you put towards it.

I really enjoy the Brentsville Neighbors. I had a stroke – can't spell or write much – but I can read your paper when it comes. Thank you.

Can't begin to tell you how much we enjoy the newsletter – every aspect of it. Thanks so much for all that you both do.

Thanks for all you do to write and publish the Brentsville neighbors. I always enjoy reading about the progress you all are making preserving the history of the Brentsville area.

We enjoy reading about the Brentsville area. We moved on Bristow Road in 1983. It will be 30 years.

I love your paper "Brentsville Neighbors" – I'm sure you all work very hard putting it out. Keep up the good work!

Since receiving the Brentsville Neighbors Newsletter I now feel that I have some new friends – What a blessing.

You really do a wonderful job on the news paper you do each month.

As always, thank you both for all the work with the Newsletter. Like many other subscribers, it's one of the real highlights of my monthly reading.

“Friendship isn't about who you have known the longest. It's about those who came and never left your side.”

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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