

# *Brentsville Neighbors*

“Preserving Brentsville’s History”

**December 2014**

Welcome Neighbors,

December is a month of traditions and no matter what faith you practice, there is sure to be something during this time of year that will make it special. As with everything else, as times change so do traditions. Some are disappearing, some are just starting to develop. But one that is going to remain very popular is the ninth annual Holiday Open House at the Historic Courthouse Site featuring again this year the beautiful voices of the Brentsville District High School Choir under the direction of Ms. Linda Beville. If you can, please plan on attending this enjoyable event that will be held on December 13, 2014, with presentations in the Union Church at 5:00pm and 6:00pm. Come early. The seats fill very quickly. This is a free event and everyone is welcome. And did I mention hot cider and cookies by a bonfire?

Is there ever a month when music plays a more important role in creating and recalling memories? For about as long as I can remember, one of my favorite songs, “Blue Christmas” as sung by Elvis Presley, creates the bitter-sweet memories of those not with us this year. But did

you know the song was first recorded in 1948? It wasn’t until 1957 that Elvis recorded it on his *Elvis’ Christmas Album*.

Sorry, I need to check out that sound I’m hearing. Very much like something up on the housetop, click, click, click...

Very best wishes,  
Kay and Morgan



## **This month:**

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Your Brentsville correspondent has long been dallying with the idea of renouncing literature as a part-time pursuit and going in for something not quite as deathless perhaps, but much more practical: To wit, carpentry. Oh, it's nothing new, this sneaking conviction that we were destined by Fate to become a second Hepplewhite; we first realized it several years ago when someone gave our son a midget sized workbench for Christmas. With joyous yells we fell upon the shiny new hammer, saw, and plane, and immediately designed and executed two original pieces of furniture out of odds and ends of lumber which the carpenters had left lying around in the attic.

One was a splendid and useful article, a combination wood-box and chair, tastefully embellished with stray pieces of picture molding . . . a substance of which our late lamented carpenters seemed to have bitten off more than they could chew. The other was a dictionary-stand with a sort of cellarette in the bottom and both were put together with hand-whittled wooden pegs. This was due to the nail-shortage, but later they were so much admired that we took to saying that we did it by choice . . . a terrible lie of course.

Having more enthusiasm than experience, we didn't do too well with the door in the bottom of the dictionary stand and it is now firmly wedged shut with, we suspect but can't prove, two bottles of sherry which we had meant to serve, along with fruitcake, to any stray Christmas visitors. Who will now have to drink tea instead. However, in the process of constructing the two above-named items, we learned much about the noble art of carpentry and felt that at last we were able to test our new-found skill on something really difficult, such as a bed.—Doll's bed, to be precise. One thing that held us up was the dearth of wooden packing boxes it being against our Christian principles to BUY wood for such a purpose. Finally we spotted just the thing we were looking for in the Safeway—a small sturdy box such as

grapes are shipped in. We were just edging out of the door with it bulging underneath our coat looking about surreptitiously like Gen Myers with the war bonds, when Mrs. Estes remarked casually "Wouldn't you like to carry your groceries in that box?" With some relief (not being the criminal type), we acknowledged that we would and even confided our purpose and desperate need. "We were driven to it by our girl-friend." We said, "aged two and a half."

Well, that was several days ago, since when we have spent every spare moment in the little room up over the kitchen, dismantling and then reassembling the box; sanding and painting and admiring our creation, and pointing out to anyone we could capture how much better it is than a store-bought one. The children, of course, are wild with curiosity to know what the sawing and hammering is about, but all we will tell them is this mysteriously: "Mother has decided NOT to use wooden pegs; just plain nails are good enough for her. Now GET AWAY FROM THAT DOOR!"

Guests of Mr. and Mrs. Benny Breeden on Thanksgiving Day were Mr. and Mrs. Wister Stephens, and Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Well, of Yorkshire. The Stephens spent Friday in Fredericksburg, attending a house warming and dance given by Mr. Stephen's cousin, Maurice H. Heflin. Mrs. Stephens visited Alexandria on Saturday, and Miss Doris Stephens spent Thanksgiving at Emporia, with friends.

The dance at the Court House on Friday night was not only well attended, it was also very well behaved. We know, because we went over for a while and it was a pleasure to see the old building filled with lights and music and boys and girls innocently enjoying themselves. We think that more of the same would be a good thing.

Guests of the Golladay's on Sunday were Mr. Golladay's nephew and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Sibert of Washington, and also Mrs. Sibert's mother and stepfather.

Mrs. Vera Bell is visiting relatives in Reading, Pennsylvania.

## Where WILD things live...

### American Kingbird

*Tyrannus tyrannus*

This small, white-bellied, conspicuous species has the largest distribution of any North American kingbird. Length 7.8–9.2" (20–23 cm). Their population peaks during mid-March to mid-June and are mostly gone by the end of September.

Adults have black head blends to slate gray back; central crown patch varies from red to yellow. Dark gray wings; narrow white edgings to upper wing coverts and secondaries. Black tail with conspicuous white terminal band. White underparts; gray patches on sides of breast, paler gray wash across middle of breast. Extensively gray underwing coverts.

Commonly found in open areas in a variety of habitats that have trees or shrubs for nest sites. They make a sturdy cup nest in a tree or shrub, sometimes on top of a stump or pole. These birds aggressively defend their territory, even against much larger birds. They can also recognize and remove cowbird eggs from their nests. Still, blue jays, American crows, squirrels, and tree-climbing snakes are on occasion nest predators. American kestrels are probable predators of adults.

They wait on an open perch and fly out to catch insects in flight, sometimes hovering to pick food off vegetation. They also eat berries and fruit, but mainly in their wintering areas. Bee martin and bee bird are merely popular names for the common American kingbird. This species lives chiefly on insects captured on the wing. It has a bad reputation because of its alleged preference for honeybees. This habit, however, according to the United States



Department of Agriculture, is much less prevalent than generally supposed and probably does not result in much damage to beekeepers. Government scientists examined 665 stomachs of kingbirds collected from various parts of the country. Only twenty-two of them contained the remains of honeybees. In the twenty-two stomachs there were sixty-one honeybees in all, of which fifty-one were drones, eight were workers,

and the remaining two were too badly broken to be further identified. This proves that individual kingbirds do sometimes acquire the bad habit of preying on honeybees, but, as the American naturalist Elliott Coues observed, it “destroys a thousand noxious insects for every bee it eats.” Therefore it appears that members of this species should not be killed unless positively proved guilty of the bee-killing habit. Many other members of the flycatcher family occasionally acquire the habit of preying on bees. There is a popular notion that the flower like crest of the kingbird serves to attract bees within reach of the bird’s bill.

During migration they are often observed in loose flocks with at least some trans-Gulf movement. They winter in South America, mainly western Amazonia (eastern Ecuador and Peru, western Brazil), but also casually as far south and east as northern Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, eastern Brazil, and Guyana. Their population is generally stable and they are relatively tolerant of human disturbances.

Source: Multiple Internet locations.

# Christmas

by  
Morgan Breeden

Christmas. Just the thought of it would generate wild dreams of wonderful toys that were always beyond hope for this boy. But was it not also true for every child in Brentsville?

Summer was the time of untethered fun which came to a sudden end in September with the start of a new school year. September and October were mostly spent getting back into the routine of school – getting homework completed – taking care of household chores. And then came November. Time to be chopping wood for the winter stove... time to dress warmly for that early morning hunt... time to anticipate the largest meal of the year when Thanksgiving dinner was served. And then after that, slowly, ever so slowly but with deliberate planning, SOON IT WOULD BE CHRISTMAS!!

I suppose we could blame Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade for really flipping the switch because that would be the first time we would actually see Santa that year. He was always last to show up in the parade but also always the most anticipated part. The official start of the Christmas Season. Now stores would start decorating and sometime around the first of December you would start to hear Christmas music. Of course, the arrival of the Sears Christmas Catalog really got us excited. So many toys and really, Mom, I really, really want these!!

Sometime around mid-December two or three of us would go out looking for the perfect tree. Usually we would find one in Webster's field. Sometimes a pine, mostly a cedar because we really didn't have space for a very large tree. But size didn't seem to be that important. We

would load it down with all kinds of ornaments—some (probably most) home made with a bright garland and last came the artificial icicles. By the time we were finished you could still almost see the tree!

When I think back on the trees at Christmas one in particular stands out in my memory. It was in the home of our grandmother, Emma Wolfe, who lived across from the courthouse in Brentsville. Their old house had one room that was almost never used – the “formal” living room. But at Christmas it surely was. It even had a fireplace but I don't remember THAT being used. Anyhow, her tree was a pine, much larger than we ever had, and her ornaments were just as special. Some of the glass balls were very old (not that it mattered to us) but what impressed me most were the little lights with water in them that would bubble when lit. Around each of these she made a “nest” of “Angel Hair” which seemed to amplify the light and then the tree was finished with tinsel icicles. I was probably not more than four or five years old at the time but I can still close my eyes and see that tree.



In our family wishing for something and getting it were two entirely different things. Our father worked as a plumber at Vint Hill and his paycheck every two weeks was almost entirely used up in food for the family. What was left went to paying bills that were always demanding attention. But come Christmas he somehow managed to get each of us four boys something very special. Well, not exactly him, but he put



the word out to Santa to make it happen. We could always look forward to an expensive gift from our Uncle George and Aunt Beth. Both of them worked and they didn't have children at that time so they would give us a very nice present every year.

Over the years there must have been many of these special gifts but three in particular stand out in my memory. I think the first one, which in all probability was to us collectively, was an Erector Set. Today you can get over a hundred special combinations to make different stuff but ours contained

very basic pieces with which we made some pretty impressive things! The next one for me



alone was a gen-u-wine **Hopalong Cassidy** outfit complete with side arms, clothes and a hat. Did that ever make me feel special! And later, as I was getting older, I just absolutely had to have a chemistry set. I told everyone that if I had one I'd invent antifreeze that would never boil or freeze. Why that? I have no idea. And yes, I got one complete with all kinds of chemicals and stuff needed in a boy's laboratory. And no, I didn't invent that antifreeze but I did make my mother very unhappy on more than one occasion. I knew sulfur would burn because my father often used it with his bees. I didn't know the smell would last so long in the house. And there was a special note in this set that said you should NEVER expose one of the chemicals to fire. To a kid that is like a sign that says, "wet paint – do NOT touch!" – the reason – it flared up with such a bang that my poor mother thought I was burning the house down. Of course, I only did it once. Sometime in the night it mysteriously disappeared.

Christmas was not only about toys. We attended the Baptist Church and several weeks before that grand event one or two of the adults would take on the job of producing a Christmas play for the enjoyment of the congregation. Each child had a part. The special ones who could remember better got to be Mary or Joseph and others, like myself, might be a Wise Man or a camel. Several of the girls were angels. I remember one of the girls got distracted and let the lighted candle get too close to her hair which promptly caught fire. Fortunately her mother was sitting in the front row and jumped up to put it out. Quite embarrassed, I might add, but some of the boys thought it amusing. What made it most special, though, was after the performance when Santa showed up (we normally knew who it was but that didn't matter) to hand out a bag with hard candy and perhaps an orange. Daddy never let us use X-mas because he said "X" represented the unknown and we should always remember who Christmas was about.

Christmas Eve we would hang our stockings (the largest sock we could find) to see what goodies might be left there. Once I cut the toe out of the sock and put a box under it to make sure I got more than one sock full but Santa caught on to my trick and put a pin in the hole. No matter how long we would sit up waiting we never heard the clatter of reindeer hooves on the roof and sooner or later we would go off to bed. Somehow we didn't have to be called to get up in the morning – normally it was well before daylight – to rush to the tree and claim the wonderful presents left by that jolly old man.



Ah yes... It's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas ...

**The following is a letter written by a German soldier in the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Cavalry describing his capture near Brentsville. The letter came from the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan and was written in German. It is provided compliments of Bill Backus, Historic Interpreter, Prince William County Historic Preservation Division**

Annapolis Feb. 22, 1863

Dear brother:

I will be pleased if this writing will find you in good health. I am, thank God, in good health, but had a hard time last week. The rebels had me in their fingers. On the 12<sup>th</sup> we went, 50 men strong, from Union Mills to Brentsville. 3 miles this side of Brentsville we separated into 3 divisions. One division should go to Wolf Run Shoals. They ran into an ambush where 9 men and 1 Lieutenant were taken prisoners. The other 2 divisions went different ways to Brentsville, where everything was quiet, but as we came back about 2 miles, they were lying in a low pine forest and we had to retreat through a hollow, then the whole column began firing on us. Those who were lucky enough to be in front escaped well enough. One scab was killed, and we lost 1 man killed, and 2 wounded. Our captain ran away. Had he been a man he would have turned around to lead, not one of the rebels would have escaped. No officer was to be seen. I made my horse gallop and when the firing began tried to get through a bush behind the rebels and I was thrown out of the saddle by a branch. My horse went wild, when it got away from the other horses. If I could have gotten 4 Rods further I could have gotten over a fence where the rebels could not have followed me, but before I could get on my saddle a rebel stood in front of me with drawn pistol shouting "Halt". As further resistance would have been foolish, I left my horse, which like a bolt ran after the others. We were taken prisoners, the rebels took us on the back of their horses. We had to ride 25 miles to their camp. There we were for 2 days, and then the following day to Gordon Mills. The next day to Richmond by train, where we were 3 days, and now we are at Annapolis. How long we will stay, or where we will go from here, I do not know. We have been treated especially good by the rebels. We have been told it will be at least 3 months before we are exchanged so do not answer until you hear from me again, and I will give you my address at once.

Many kindly regards to you all,

I remain your brother

Frederick Schmalzriedt

# When WAR Came to Brentsville

SIGEL'S HEADQUARTERS, December 8, 1862.

Major-General BURNSIDE and  
Major-General HEINTZELMAN:

The patrols and scouts who have come in during the night and morning report no enemy near Wolf Run Shoals, at Brentsville, Greenwich, Thoroughfare Gap, Rectortown, and Middleburg. Near Mount Gilead they made a prisoner, of the Fourth Virginia Cavalry, who was sleeping in a house. This prisoner says that he learned from Mr. Barr, at Mount Gilead, who came from Winchester, that there was only a provost guard at that place; that White's cavalry force were at White Post, between Winchester and Ashby's Gap, and that White was severely wounded in the hip in the fight at Berryville. I will send a patrol for Mr. Barr immediately, to have him brought in.

F. SIGEL,  
Major-General.

Franz Sigel (November 18, 1824 – August 21, 1902) was a German military officer, revolutionist and immigrant to the United States who was a teacher, newspaperman, politician, and served as a Union major general in the American Civil War.

Sigel taught in the New York City public schools and served in the state militia. In 1857, he became a professor at the German-American Institute in St. Louis. He was elected director of the St. Louis public schools in 1860. He was influential in the Missouri immigrant community. He attracted Germans to the Union and anti-slavery causes when he openly supported them in 1861.

Shortly after the start of the war, Sigel was commissioned colonel of the 3rd Missouri Infantry, a commission dating from May 4, 1861. He recruited and organized an expedition to southwest Missouri, and subsequently fought the Battle of Carthage, where



a force of pro-Confederate Missouri militia handed him a setback in a strategically insignificant fight. However, Sigel's defeat did help spark recruitment for the Missouri State Guard and local Confederate forces. Sigel later took part in a skirmish at Dug Springs.

Throughout the summer, President Abraham Lincoln was actively seeking the support of anti-slavery, pro-Unionist immigrants. Sigel, always popular with the German immigrants, was a good candidate to advance this plan. He

was promoted to brigadier general on August 7, 1861, to rank from May 17, one of a number of early political generals endorsed by Lincoln.

Sigel served under Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Lyon in the capture of the Confederate Camp Jackson in St. Louis and at the Battle of Wilson's Creek, where his command was routed after making a march around the Confederate camp and attacking from the rear.

Sigel conducted the retreat of the army after the death of General Lyon.

His finest performance came on March 8, 1862, at the Battle of Pea Ridge, where he commanded two divisions and personally directed the Union artillery in the defeat of Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn on the second day of the battle.

Sigel was promoted to major general on March 21, 1862. He served as a division commander in the Shenandoah Valley and fought unsuccessfully against Maj. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, who managed to outwit and defeat the larger Union force in a number of small engagements. He commanded the I Corps in Maj. Gen. John Pope's Army of Virginia at the Second Battle of Bull Run, another Union defeat, where he was wounded in the hand.

Over the winter of 1862–63, Sigel commanded the XI Corps, consisting primarily of German immigrant soldiers, in the Army of the Potomac. During this period, the corps saw no action; it stayed in reserve during the Battle of Fredericksburg. Sigel had developed a reputation as an inept general, but his ability to recruit and motivate German immigrants kept him alive in a politically sensitive position. Many of these soldiers could speak little English beyond "I'm going to fight mit Sigel", which was their proud slogan and which became one of the favorite songs of the war. They were quite disgruntled when Sigel left the corps in February 1863, and was replaced by Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard, who had no immigrant affinities. Fortunately for Sigel, the two blackmarks in the XI Corps' reputation—Chancellorsville and Gettysburg—would occur after he was relieved.

The reason for Sigel's relief is unclear. Some accounts cite failing health; others that he expressed his displeasure at the small size of his corps and asked to be relieved. General-in-chief Henry W. Halleck detested Sigel, and managed to keep him relegated to light duty in eastern Pennsylvania until March 1864. President Lincoln, for political reasons, directed Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton to place Sigel in command of the new Department of West Virginia.

In his new command, Sigel opened the Valley Campaigns of 1864, launching an invasion of the Shenandoah Valley. He was soundly defeated by Maj. Gen. John C. Breckenridge at the Battle of New Market, on May 15, 1864, which was particularly embarrassing due to the prominent role young cadets from the Virginia Military Institute played in his defeat. After the battle, Sigel was replaced by Maj. Gen. David Hunter. In July, Sigel fought Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early at Harpers Ferry, but soon afterward was replaced by Albion P. Howe. Sigel spent the rest of the war without an active command.

Sigel resigned his commission on May 4, 1865. He worked as editor of the Baltimore *Wecker* for a short time, and then as a newspaper editor in New York City. He filled a variety of political positions there, both as a Democrat and a Republican. In 1869, he ran on the Republican ticket for Secretary of State of New York but was defeated by the incumbent Democrat Homer Augustus Nelson. In May 1871 he was collector of internal revenue, and then in October 1871 register of the city. In 1887, President Grover Cleveland appointed him pension agent for the city of New York. He also lectured, worked in advertising and published the *New York Monthly*, a German-American periodical, for some years. Franz Sigel died in New York in 1902 and is buried there in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. Elsie Sigel was his granddaughter.

Statues of him stand in Riverside Park in Manhattan and in Forest Park in St. Louis. There is also a park named for him in the Bronx, just south of the Courthouse near Yankee Stadium. Sigel Street in Williamsburg, Brooklyn was named after him, Sigel Street in Worcester, Massachusetts was also named after him, as well as the village of Sigel, Pennsylvania, founded in 1865. Sigel Township, Minnesota, settled in 1856 and organized in April 1862, was also named for Sigel. In about 1873 Sigel himself visited Sigel Township and New Ulm, Minnesota.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



(Continued from page 2)

Mrs. John Cox's brother, Mr. Richard Wheelock, and his wife spent the Thanksgiving holiday with the Coxes after driving down from Wynnewood, Pa. They all attended the dance at the Court House in Brentsville on Friday evening.

There was a birthday dinner at the Shoemaker's on Sunday in honor of Mr. Grady Shoemaker's birthday.

Mrs. Ep Woodyard spent the week-end with her daughter, Mrs. Harvey Watson. Mr. Watson recently escaped serious injury when the car he was driving collided with another on the Woodbridge road.

Visiting the Beards is Mrs. Beard's Aunt, Annie Hunt of Philadelphia. Mr. and Mrs. Tinsley, of Arlington were guests for Thanksgiving dinner.

Mrs. Peterson has recently heard from her daughter, Betty in Havana; and says that she is enjoying the novelty of winter swimming and sailing.

The Corbins were positively swamped with Sunday caller, out to see the new baby, among whom were Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Hooks, of North Carolina, Mr. and Mrs. Edward John, of N. Y., and from Washington Miss Charlotte Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. C. McKee, and Mrs. Shelley Groves and Mr. and Mrs. J. Potts. On Monday Mrs. Corbin attended the wedding of Miss Charlotte Johnson to Mr. Don Larson, in Washington.

Dinner guests of the Kempton's on Sunday were Mr. and Mrs. Dugan, of Washington and their two children, Kathleen and Jackie. On Saturday Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kempton drove to Charlottesville to see the Freedom Train.

Although we personally were only casually acquainted with Mary Wright, she had good friends among the children of Brentsville, many of whom were in her sixth grade class year before last at the Brentsville District School. On their behalf, and at their request, we wish to extend deepest sympathy to her family and attempt to express their profound, if inarticulate regret for so tragic and seemingly unnecessary a loss.

Very Sincerely,

Agnes Webster

Source: The Manassas Messenger, December 5, 1947

## Feedback

I just read your account of Lafayette Baker, most interesting. I see the reference to research by alternative historian Ray Neff, and as I am familiar with the facts/fiction/folklore he wrote at various times about his kinsman Colonel John Francis Neff of the 33rd Virginia, I would like to point out that a good percentage of what he wrote about that individual ranged from speculative to pure creative writing, presented as fact... I understand that Dr. Neff was a brilliant and delightful fellow, and I wish I had the opportunity to discuss some of his conclusions, but at this point I personally would be skeptical of the "history" that he presented related to the Lincoln assassination without comparison to more scholarly, accepted accounts by other eminent historians.

Thank you for your newsletter, which I eagerly anticipate and without exception read from beginning to end.

Rusty Hicks

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Enjoyed it from cover to cover as always! Need to correct the First Thanksgiving info. It will be celebrated this week-end at Berkley Plantation just east of Richmond. The first official Thanksgiving was in the fall of 1619. Almost a full year before the one in New England. Well worth the trip down to see the festivities.

Lit Churchill

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Really enjoyed the newsletter. Loved Mrs. Websters' poem. Didn't know about PFC Beans return. It's so easy to forget the wars of long ago. Vietnam is already long ago. If I'm not mistaken, the Nestors are in the Nelson house! Bet that's the same big tree in front. Loved the spy story..there's so much that never gets told. Was down in Westmoreland county recently where Booth was supposedly shot. Is there any historical marker..no.

My grandparents used to use the phrase "gay" to describe a party etc..now it's totally different. Hey..the beat goes on.

Barb Janay

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As always you over did yourself with this one. I was just thinking about Mr and Mrs Cox yesterday and telling Malcolm about the Halloween they had and how I loved to go over there.....will let you know of those times someday. Again very nice newsletter. Thank you

Dottie Furrow

# Brentsville Neighbors

## “Preserving Brentsville’s History”

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All back issues on:

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**IN GOD WE TRUST**

