

Brentsville Neighbors

“Preserving Brentsville’s History”

February 2015

Welcome neighbors,

Now that January is over along with the many activities associated with the various holidays, we can take a deep breath and start thinking about the coming year. There will be a lot going on at the Brentsville site and we certainly hope all of you who can will take advantage of the offerings. I’m sure it will enrich our appreciation of this wonderful place.

Restoration of the jail ranks high on our personal list of interests and although work slowed a bit during the holidays, things are quickly getting back up to speed. The Exhibit Design should be finalized by the time you read this with all the final documents in place. The interior structural work is going along well and they are starting to frame in the second floor. I hope to share some pictures of the progress next month.

Kicking off the 2015 season will be a brand new program—a walking tour of the town—to be conducted on April 25th. It will be an all day event, including lunch. Much more information on this in the next editions. Other events will include a “Historic Fashion Show and Tea,” “Prince William County After the War,” “Juneteenth: Abolition in Prince William County,”

“Flea Market at Brentsville,” “Rhoda Fewell and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Civil War Veterans,” “Prince William County Farm Tour – Brentsville Stop,” and “Spirits of Brentsville Courthouse.” There will be other activities as well and we will be sure to let you know about each in advance so you can plan accordingly.

We are always very happy to uncover new information about the history of Brentsville and this issue contains more than one example. The photo of Dr. Bell and the newspaper advertisements he published concerning the sale of the courthouse are good examples. But to fit in with that very nicely was another newspaper item—the Roll of Honor from 1913 that identified a number of students who would have moved from the old one-room school to the “new” two room school in the old courthouse. And the story about Robert Cooper is a gem! Things like this sure make the time reading through old documents very worth while.

Very best wishes,
Kay and Morgan

This month:

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| ➤ Letter From Brentsville | page 2 | ➤ When War Came | pages 7 & 8 |
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| ➤ A School for Brentsville-P.S. | pages 4 & 5 | | |
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We have spent the past week vigorously housecleaning, and STILL pine needles, bits of holly and tinsel and colored string lurk in various hiding places, successfully eluding the vacuum cleaner and waiting for the preachers wife to come to call. Christmas is very nice, but it certainly is MESSY. All of that melting snow didn't improve the situation either. If anybody has a receipt for making small boys clean off their boots at the back door, I wish they would communicate it to this column. Mrs. Cox, who is suddenly the proud parent of two bouncing school-agers, had a scheme which involved sticks of wood and a large brush. I forget what the sticks of wood were for but the puppies carried the brush away and buried it in the mud so that was the end of THAT.

And while in an inquiring mood, let me ask what other people do with those pieces of ribbon and tissue-paper that are always left over after the presents have been wrapped? My method, which I am beginning to suspect is not too efficient, is to put them all carefully together in a special place in the attic so as to be sure and have them next year, but by the time Christmas comes around again they have generally managed to crawl off to a remote spot and burrow under a pile of old magazines. Whereupon my husband rushes out impetuously and buys quantities more, which in turn are stowed away, this time in plain sight where I am POSITIVE I will be able to find them. But I refuse to give up. There must be some method of dealing with these things, if one only knew the secret. Which reminds me, — don't throw away your old Xmas Cards. There were so many pretty ones this year and they are wanted for scrapbooks for Children's Hospital in Richmond.

Well, things are slowly getting back to normal. The juveniles seem to have survived their first week back at school after the holidays, despite gloomy predictions to the contrary. People are visiting again: Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Michael were out to see their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ervine Spitzer on Thursday and Mrs. William Brown's son, Frank Smith, was back from a trip to New York.

Mrs. Bennie Breeden has been quite sick at her home. We all wish her a speedy recovery.

Mr. Bell has been quite sick again and Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Bell and Al Speakes of Alexandria were out last week.

We are sorry to hear that Mrs. Joe Keys is ill.

David Landon, and Cash and Kenneth Keys, from Washington, are visiting Mrs. Myrtle Keys.

The Brentsville Presbyterian Church held services and communion on Sunday night. Freddie Wolf was baptized.

Mrs. Cecil Yancey is in the Naval hospital.

There was a good deal of excitement last week when a fire started in Mr. Hedrick's chimney and the fire engine was called out from Manassas. It was soon brought under control however and no damage done.

Miss Alice Fletcher left on Monday for Manassas for an indefinite stay.

Out-of-town guests of Mr. and Mrs. Beard were Annie Hunt of Philadelphia, and Mrs. Beard's mother from Arlington. Carl Beard attended the birthday party in Arlington of Patricia Tinsley.

Earl Cordell spent Sunday visiting his sister, Mrs. Jim Shoemaker.

Mrs. John Rollins is staying alternately with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Petersen, and his parents while her husband is away.

Mr. and Mrs. Ermine Wade and family, Mr. and Mrs. Eddie Beeche of Alexandria, Mrs. Aline Winter, and Mr. Dusty Escher of Washington, were guests of Mrs. Myrtle Keys.

And last but not least, anybody who wishes to DO SOMETHING about the projected pay raise for teachers in Prince William can write a polite but firm letter to the Rev. Murray Taylor at Independent Hill. If something isn't done, and soon, we will find ourselves in the embarrassing position of having to teach the little dears ourselves and I, personally, would rather be shot than have to bone up on Algebra and English Grammar at THIS late date!

Yours sincerely,

Agnes Webster

Source: The Manassas Messenger, January 17, 1947

Where WILD things live...

Downy Woodpecker - *Picoides pubescens*

Adult downy woodpeckers are the smallest of North America's woodpeckers. The total length of the species ranges from 5.5 to 7.1 in and the wingspan from 9.8 to 12.2 in. It is mainly black on the upperparts and wings, with a white back, throat and belly and white spotting on the wings. There is a white bar above the eye and one below. They have a black tail with white outer feathers barred with black. Adult males have a red patch on the back of the head whereas juvenile birds display a red cap.

The downy woodpecker is virtually identical in plumage pattern to the much larger hairy woodpecker, but it can be distinguished from the hairy by the presence of black spots on its white tail feathers and the length of its bill. The downy woodpecker's bill is shorter than its head, whereas the hairy woodpecker's bill is approximately equal to head length.

It gives a number of vocalizations, including a short pik call. Like other woodpeckers, it also produces a drumming sound with its beak as it pecks into trees. Compared to other North American species its drums are slow.

Their breeding habitat is forested areas, mainly deciduous, across most of North America to Central America. Those that live in the southern part of their range mate in late winter. They mate in the early spring if they live in the northern part of their range. Both the male and the female make the nest by pecking a hole in a dead tree, fence post or sometimes, a telephone pole. The

nest can take up to two weeks to dig out. The female lays four to five white eggs. The eggs are incubated for about twelve days. Both parents incubate the eggs and care for the chicks. The chicks first leave the nest when they are about

three weeks old. In the northern part of their range, downy woodpeckers favor open deciduous forests and woodlands. This includes mixed, secondary-growth forests of oak-hickory or beech-maple-hemlock. They are less common in conifer-dominated forests unless there is a deciduous understory. Downy woodpeckers are also common in cultivated areas such as orchards, and are sometimes found in urban

and suburban settings. In the south, they frequent riparian woods or moist, aspen-willow stands.

These birds are mostly permanent residents. Northern birds may migrate further south; birds in mountainous areas may move to lower elevations. They roost in tree cavities in the winter.

Downy woodpeckers forage on trees, picking the bark surface in summer and digging deeper in winter. They use their bill to drill into trees and dig out insects like beetles, wasps, moths and insect larvae. They mainly eat insects, also seeds and berries. In winter, especially, downy woodpeckers can often be found in suburban backyards with trees and will feed on suet at birdfeeders.

Source: Various Internet Locations



A School for Brentsville

Post Script

I've found that composing information about a past event in Brentsville that is both accurate and complete is a risky venture. Something always seems to happen after the fact.

Such was the story about the new school in Brentsville. I had patiently waited until I had all of the information before trying to compose the story, or so I thought ... BUT... soon after it was printed I started learning more. Not that this is a bad thing. Quite the contrary. New information is always welcome. For example, I have always been of the impression that the old school was a one-room wooden structure and it might have been just that because in the January 16, 1914, School Board Minutes it was reported "...and that Smith Moore has agreed to move the old white school building on said lot for a Colored School for the sum of \$15.00." This means the building was small enough to pick up and physically move so it could not have been very large. BUT, the February 6, 1913, edition of The Manassas Democrat published a "ROLL OF HONOR" (see next page) clearly indicating two rooms meaning this was a "Graded School" probably serving grades 1 thru 7. They reported enrollment of 65 with an average attendance of 58.18 students. Certainly not a small school by the standards of that period which only required 20 students to qualify as a school.

During 1912 the Brentsville District School Board was still not sure where they wanted the new school so they "... appointed a committee to look into the situation at Brentsville with a view to obtaining sites for both white & colored schools ..." This might have annoyed Dr. Bell who must have thought the sale of his property to the School Board was ascertained. So to keep interest alive, he ran an advertisement in the Manassas Democrat dated March 7, 1912 and March 28, 1912 as follows: "FOR SALE One house and lot in Brentsville, four acres. The old court house lot with two buildings, about four acres. One house with storeroom, about one-half acre. Inquire of W. J. Bell, Bristow, Virginia." It must have worked because soon after the property was bought by the school board and the rest, as they say, is history.

I have had very little luck finding more information about Dr. Bell other than this obituary from the Manassas Journal, August 5, 1921:

Dr. William John Bell, Confederate veteran and retired physician, of Brentsville, died yesterday at noon at the home of his daughter, Mrs. J. W. Hedrick, of Nokesville. He has been in failing health for eight months, part of which time was spent in a hospital at Staunton, his former home.

His body will be shipped to Staunton tomorrow for burial in Mount Horeb Presbyterian Church, and interment will be made beside the body of his wife.

Dr. Bell was eighty-four years old. He was born in Augusta county in October, 1836, and came to this county twenty-five years ago, after spending a few months at Auburn, Fauquier county. He served in the Confederate army during the civil war, and was a member of Ewell Camp. He had been a member of Presbyterian Church for many



Photo by Mr. Harmon
from Ewell Camp, C. V.,
as published in the
Manassas Democrat,
May 16, 1912

years. He was a graduate of Washington and Lee University and had practiced medicine in Augusta county as well as in this section.

Dr. Bell was the last surviving member of his family. He leaves two daughters and four sons, Mrs. Hedrick, Mrs. H. D. Barnes, of Chatham, N. Y.; Mr. M. A. Bell, of Aden, and Messrs. Frank E.,

(Continued from page 4)

J. A. and Hugh B. Bell, of Washington, all of whom will accompany the body to its final resting place at Staunton. His wife [Mary A.] died January 25, 1920, a few months after the celebration of their golden wedding anniversary.

It seems that Dr. and Mrs. Bell lived in the old jail building up until the time of her death. Less than two years later Dr. Bell also passed away and the Brentsville home was sold by the estate administrator to Nannie B. Lam on September 15, 1921 (DB 76 Page 107).



Miss Martha Gertrude Via (Owens)
1898 - 1970
photo courtesy of Mrs. Flory

In a lovely note from Mrs. Mary Owens Flory, she wrote: "January's article about the school board purchasing and remodeling the court house into a two-room school was especially interesting to me because Martha Via was my mother. I knew she taught there but was not sure what years and I did not know she was appointed principal. From the article I now know she taught from 1913 to 1917 when she married my Dad – to be exact, Sept. 2, 1917. I also did not know there was a record of it anywhere. She told me she and Mrs. Mae House Ellis boarded in the white house across the road and she would have to go over and start the fire in the stove each morning. If my memory is correct a Mrs. Cooper owned the white house at that time."

ROLL OF HONOR

The following is the Roll of honor for Brentsville School for the month of January. For those who have been present seventeen days or more.

Room 1.

James W. Keys,	Fannie Shaffer,
James Woodyard,	Ora Hollar,
Carl Swartz,	Tracie Spitzer,
James M. Keys,	Nettie Hensley,
Harvey Woodyard,	Bessie Holderman,
John Holderman,	Stella Shaffer,
Lee Keys,	Viola Dunarm,
Dewey Keys,	Cleo Shoemaker,
William Varner,	Edith Shoemaker,
Fred Shank,	Minnie Keys,
Alice Woodyard,	May Moliar.

Room 2.

Philip Bradshaw,	Frank Varner,
David Keys,	Margaret Breeden
Cassius Keys,	Pearl Hensley,
Peter Woodyard,	Ruth Hensley,
Paul Woodyard,	Emma Holderman,
Howard Swartz,	Gafelia Holderman,
Ezra Shaffer	

Enrollment, 65: Average attendance, 58.18.

Miss Rena Ellicott.

Miss Sallie Cooper.

Teachers

Source:.. The Manassas Democrat, February 6, 1913

A Brentsville Citizen of Note

A MODEST HERO OF THE CONFEDERACY

ROBERT ALEXANDER COOPER

Always Prompt and Ready to Obey the Call to Duty—Private in Company A, 49th Virginia Infantry.

In these days of fashion, feathers and fuss—days when rank and titles are eagerly sought from, and by, those who never felt a scar or heard the whistle of a minie, shriek of the shrapnel or boom of a death-dealing bomb, it is refreshing to know that we have of the only two known survivors of the “Ewell Guards,” now living in Prince William county, at least one genuine hero in the person of the modest gentleman, a former high private in the rear rank of Company A, Forty-ninth Virginia Infantry, Robert Alexander Cooper, living at Brentsville, where the company was organized, drilled and mustered into service, and from where we marched to the battlefield of July 18, and first Manassas, July 21, 1861. I offer a few words of absolute facts, that while boring his family may be honored and he receive the praise of “well done good and faithful” soldier.

Sandy Cooper, with his dry humor and modest demeanor, was always prompt and ready to obey the call of duty. He passed safely through the Seven Pines abattis when his company lost 26 killed and wounded out of 48 rank and file, but was wounded on the last day of the seven days battle at Malvern Hill. Returning to duty he participated in the various other battles in which the “Bloody 49th Virginia” was engaged.

In the latter part of 1863 when the Army of Northern Virginia was preparing for winter quarters south of Rappahannock river, Gen. Lee had a brigade on the north side of the river doing picket duty. Most of this brigade was captured and the pontoon bridge taken possession of by the enemy. A detail of fifty men under an officer were unsuccessful in their effort to burn this pontoon so that in this exigency Gen. Lee

called for volunteer for this dangerous service. Out of the fifty there were three privates and one lieutenant of which Sandy was one.

A trench was dug along the river bank so that hay and other inflammable material could be married somewhat protected from the enemies’ fire which was heavy whenever a blaze was shown. First it was necessary to extinguish the little fire, which was done by stealthily rubbing wet sticks upon it.

After persistent effort the combustible material was put in the boats and the matches applied, beginning on the north side. For this dangerous though successful volunteer work Gen. Lee awarded a 60 day furlough to each of the four participants.

Fifty eventful years have elapsed since this heroic act was staged in real war, now hurriedly and poorly portrayed, the tardiness of which may be explained in part by the refusal (from envy or hatred, for “wrath is cruel, anger outrageous, but who can withstand envy?”) of another paper to publish this simple story of undaunted courage of one of a company which had received the thanks of the Lieutenant-General commanding Stonewall Jackson’s corps at Spotsylvania Court House—a company which had as early as the battle of Winchester, Sept. 19, 1864, lost in killed and wounded in the aggregate more, numerically, than was ever on the muster-roll—the only company, as far as the writer’s best information obtainable goes, that charged, entered, killed and drove the remnant out of the enemy’s breastworks at Culp’s Hill, Gettysburg, 1863. Thus there were so many heroic acts that to individuals would have been invidious.

Gainesville, Va. Apr. 13. [1913]

Source: The Manassas Democrat, April 10, 1913

When WAR Came to Brentsville

HDQRS. THIRTEENTH REGIMENT PENNSYLVANIA CAVALRY,
Bristoe, Va., February 14, 1864.

Major ROBERT A. McCOY,
Acting Assistant Adjutant-General:

MAJOR: I have the honor to report that I scouted the country in the direction of Brentsville, Broad Run, and by Jersey Settlement and found no enemy nor any directions of their presence in the vicinity of the localities above named.

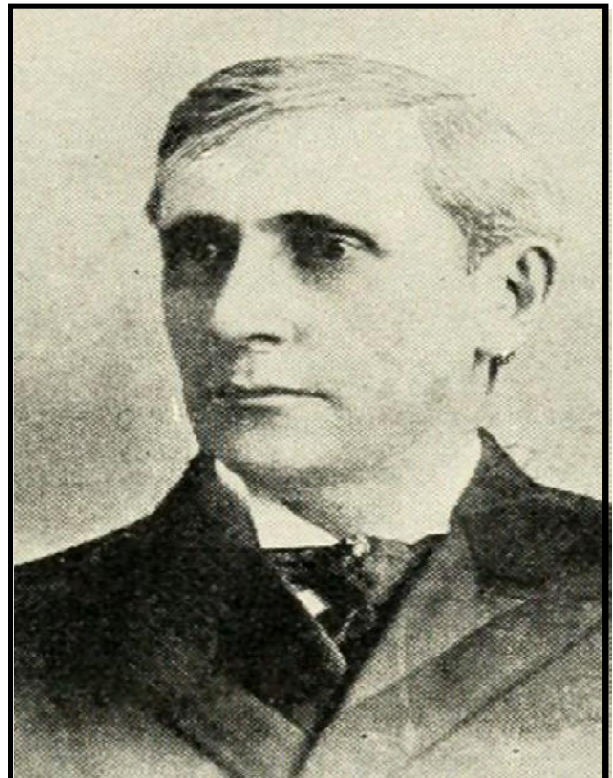
I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

M. KERWIN,
Major, Commanding Thirteenth Regiment Pennsylvania Cavalry.

Irish Colonels: Michael Kerwin, 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry

Michael Kerwin was born in Co. Wexford on 15th August 1837. He emigrated with his parents to the United States at the age of 10, settling in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There he was educated in a private academy and trained as a lithographic printer. In his spare time he spent a number of years involved with a local volunteer militia company, until the outbreak of war in 1861 led him to embark on a much more serious military career.

In April 1861 Michael Kerwin enlisted as a private in the largely Irish 24th Pennsylvania Regiment, where he quickly rose to First Sergeant in Company H. The three-month regiment formed part of Tyrone native General Robert Patterson's force which advanced into Virginia early in the war. The forward Union



movement presented Kerwin with a first opportunity to demonstrate his mettle. He volunteered to precede the army across the Potomac River, and infiltrate the Rebel lines to ascertain the force that lay ahead. Disguising himself, the Irishman successfully passed through Confederate camps around Martinsburg, returning to his own lines with an estimate of enemy numbers and dispositions. Kerwin would not remain in the ranks for long.

Following the expiration of his service with the 24th Pennsylvania, Kerwin began his long association with the cavalry arm. He became the Captain of Company B, 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry dating from 27th March 1862. Again promotion came quickly for him, and he became the unit's Major on 20th October of the same year. Perhaps the regiment's most notable action took place on 12th October 1863 at White Sulphur Springs, Virginia, when the 13th was part of a picket force that attempted to hold off a large enemy advance. Severely outnumbered, the horsemen kept fighting against the odds for some 6 hours, during which time they sustained significant losses.

Michael Kerwin became the Colonel of the 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry dating from 22nd April 1864. The regiment formed part of General Sheridan's command in the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign. The Wexford native was sporadically called on to take acting command of the 2nd Brigade, 2nd Division of the Cavalry Corps, holding the post for a number of days in August, October and November 1864 and February 1865. In the latter month his command was pulled from in front of Petersburg and dispatched to Wilmington, North Carolina, in order to meet up with General Sherman's army which was then marching through Georgia. They rendezvoused with Sherman's troops at Fayetteville, where Kerwin took command of the

3rd Brigade, 3rd Division of Kilpatrick's cavalry. He remained in charge at Fayetteville until the close of the conflict, when he returned to Philadelphia and was mustered out on 14th July 1865.

Michael Kerwin's martial career did not end with the close of the Civil War. He was a noted Fenian, and following his discharge he immediately travelled to Ireland, commissioned by John O'Mahony to James Stephens who was the Chief Organiser of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Intending to assist in an armed struggle to gain Irish independence, Kerwin was arrested and detained in prison by the British for a number of months before being returned to the United States, where he remained active in the Irish movement. After the war he married the widow of another Fenian and American Civil War veteran, Colonel Denis Burke of the 88th New York Infantry, Irish Brigade.

The Wexford native worked in a number of varied posts following his return to the United States. Moving from Philadelphia to New York in 1870, he became Collector of Internal Revenue for the Second District of the city, and later served as the Police Commissioner. He subsequently acted as the Pension Agent for New York, a position he took over from Franz Siegel. He established the Irish nationalist paper the New York Tablet which he owned with David Power Conyngham, historian of the Irish Brigade. Michael Kerwin lived until the age of 74, passing away on 20th June 1912 at his home at 487 West 145th Street, New York. The New York Times listed his cause of death as 'senile infirmities'. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia in Section 3, Lot 2169.

Source: <http://irishamericancivilwar.com/2012/01/05/irish-colonels-michael-kerwin-13th-pennsylvania-cavalry/>

EWELL CAMP OF CONFEDERATE VETS.

ORGANIZED MARCH 30, 1890

In Two Decades, membership Has Reduced Over Fifty Per Cent Primarily by Death—Its Present Officers.

Ewell Camp, of United Confederate veterans was organized in Brentsville, then the County seat of Prince William county, on March 30, 1890, with a membership of 64, with the following officers: J. E. Herrell, Commander; R. H. Hooe, 1st. Lieut. Commander; John A. Brawner, 2nd. Lieut. Commander; J. S. Colvin, 3rd Lieut. Commander; Geo. W. Nutt, adjutant; W. W. Kincheloe, treasurer, H. F. Lynn, Officer of the day; B. L. Pridmore, vidette; and Dr. J. S. Powell, surgeon.

The object of the organization is to epitomize in the true spirit of fellowship, benevolence and magnanimity which pervades every sentence embodied in the creed which is spread upon its records: "To perpetuate the memories of our fallen comrades; to minister as far as practicable to the wants of those who were permanently disabled in the service; to preserve and maintain that sentiment of fraternity, born of hardships and dangers shared in the march, the bivouac and on the battlefield; not to prolong the animosities engendered by the war, but to extend to our adversaries, on every fitting occasion, courtesies—which are always proper between soldiers and which, in our case, a common citizenship demands at our hands."

At customary periods of strewing flowers upon the graves and paying tributes of praise to the Confederate dead, this noble band of heroes is ever present, so far as health and bodily strength will allow, with loving hands,

sympathizing hearts and patriotic voices to take part in the ceremonies which keep alive the memories of fallen comrades and perpetuate that devotion to their beloved Southland which will only be silenced by the last roll-call.

Since its organization 35 members have, in the language of the immortal "Stonewall" Jackson passed over the river to rest under the shade of the trees, leaving but 29 now in the thin line which is rapidly nearing the shores of eternity.

The time is now near at hand when the small remnant of this camp, now living, and such as are able to attend, will once more gather upon sacred soil, at the gates of our "silent city," and pay tribute to those who, for over a half century, have been sleeping beneath and in the shadow of the monument erected by loving hearts and hands through generous contributions of Southern sympathizers, to their memory.

Each succeeding memorial day will mark the passing of one or more members of Ewell Camp to the bivouac of the dead, thereto await a glorious re-union where no more will be heard the roar of cannon and musketry, and where the armies of centuries will be drawn up in a last review before the Great Commander.

The present membership of Ewell Camp is 31 and its officers for the current year are: 1st. Lieut. Commander, A. H. Compton; 2nd. Lieut. Commander, John W. Hall; 3rd. Lieut. Commander, Geo. W. Nutt; Adjutant, Westwood Hutchison; Treasurer, Geo. W. Johnson; Quartermaster, W. T. Whorton; Surgeon, Dr. H. M. Clarkson; Officer of the day, J. P. Manuel; Vidette, H. F. Lynn; Chaplain, Rev. H. L. Quarles; and Color-bearer, J. P. Smith. The Executive committee is composed of H. F. Lynn, Geo. W. Johnson and Westwood Hutchison.



Standing (L-R): Willis Johnson (son of a veteran), Robert B. Cushing, Wm. H. Brown, J. P. Smith, J. Peyton Manuel, Wilton Boyd, John L. Meetze, Dr. H. L. Quarles, George W. Johnson, Prof. B. T. H. Hedge, John W. Hall, George H. Smith, W. T. Whorton, Capt. J. E. Herrell, Thos. Smith, Jas. B. Johnson (son of a veteran), and Jas. F. Gulick.

Lower row (L-R): Robert A. Pearson, George W. Nutt, John B. Tillette, Dr. Wm. J. Bell, Henry F. Lynn, Westwood Hutchison, T. A. Thomasson, Dr. H. M. Clarkson and Capt. J. R. Rust.

Source: The Manassas Democrat, May 16, 1912. Photo by Harmon, a Manassas photographer.

Brentsville Neighbors

“Preserving Brentsville’s History”

Contact us on:

morganbreeden@aol.com

All back issues on:

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

IN GOD WE TRUST

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

