

# *Brentsville Neighbors*

“Preserving Brentsville’s History”

**April 2015**

Welcome neighbors,

I’ve heard that we all have a “hot button” and I’m no exception. Probably at the top of the list is reading a news article which states that Brentsville is **in** Bristow. Or Brentsville is **in** Nokesville. Or Brentsville is **in** Manassas. Yes, I’ve seen all three. I just don’t understand why it is so hard to believe that Brentsville is **in Brentsville!** I was recently venting over a story about the Historic Preservation Division properties which reported that Brentsville was in Bristow and to my great dismay, I was told by one of it’s employees that, “it’s technically correct.” The premise being that the site receives mail via the Bristow post office therefore it is **in** Bristow. Give me a break!! Is Greenwich in Nokesville? Is Independent Hill in Manassas? It just so happens that residents of Brentsville receive mail from Bristow, Nokesville AND Manassas so with that logic does it mean that we are actually in all three other places? I think it is part of the master plan to keep our beautiful town under the proverbial bushel basket! My fight continues.

Early last month I accompanied two staff members on a visit to the historic Pulaski Jail. This facility covers almost the exact time period as does ours and even looks much the same. We took a bunch of pictures and recorded details of the construction to help make our own jail more authentic.

Don’t forget to mark your calendar for April 25<sup>th</sup> when there will be a walking tour of our town from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. with lunch provided. The cost is

\$35.00 per person and reservations are very necessary. We plan to visit historic buildings (both present and gone), cemeteries and to discuss things you may not have known. Please dress appropriately for the weather and bring something small to sit on along the way if you wish. No pets please. Call 703-792-4754 to make your reservations. For those not familiar with the area, the courthouse is located at 12229 Bristow Road, Bristow, VA (but in Brentsville – NOT Bristow).. We will meet in the one-room school. See you there!

We are also glad to report that the site (the one in Brentsville) is starting to gain more popularity for groups of visitors. During the past month a large group of girl scouts (combined troops) visited Brentsville for an early Easter Egg Hunt. The farm house was open for tours and hoecakes and the staff assisted with historic games on the lawn. Next month we anticipate a visit from the Daughters of the American Revolution for a group tour and brown bag lunch. We think this is going to be a fun time!

Are you planning an event this summer and thinking about a great place to hold it? Why not call Mike or Bill at 703-365-7895 to see if Brentsville is right for you!

Very best wishes,  
Kay and Morgan

## **This month:**

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## Letter From Brentsville



At this point I must publicly retract all of the nasty things I have been saying about the weatherman, and admit that he really came through in a big way on Easter Sunday. Of course there is always the possibility that he is in the pay of some New York hat designer, but in view of the benefits reaped by the general public, and ladies with new Easter Bonnets in particular, we will refrain from pointing the finger of suspicion at that already much-maligned individual.

There was more activity in Brentsville last week end than I have seen in months; cars arriving and departing at a great rate, church bells ringing, the baseball game in progress in the field behind Joe Keys, painfully clean little boys with shiny ears walking sedately along the road glimpses of girls in bright colored spring suits, and the Wolfe's plum tree in full blossom. We had one lone daffodil out in the front yard, and the whole family gathered about to admire it frantically.

Mr. and Mrs. Ermine Wade were guests of Mr. and Mrs. G. B. Shoemaker on Sunday.

The Paul Johnsons, of Nokesville, visited Morris Keys.

Mr. and Mrs. Stephens spent the week-end in Alexandria with Mrs. Stephens' sister, Mrs. Nolls.

The Hedrick's children and grandchildren were all home for Easter.

Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Ritchie, and Helen Michael, were guests of Mr. and Mrs. Spitzer, and Sidney Spitzer was home for the holiday.

Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Keys and family spent Sunday afternoon in Brentsville.

Little Linda Shoemaker is spending the week in Falls Church with her uncle, Mr. Earl Cordell.

Mr. and Mrs. Ben Shoemaker visited Falls Church and Washington on Sunday, and Mrs. Shoemaker's nephew, Bobbie Cordell, is spending a few days at their home.

Sergeant Newton and family attended the Sunrise Ceremonies at Arlington on Easter morning.

Mrs. Bradshaw's niece and nephew, Nancy and Louis Frinks, from Denver, Colorado, were out on Monday and will return next week to spend some time.

Mr. and Mrs. Joe Keys and family spent Sunday in Washington, visiting Mrs. Key's daughter, Mary Louise Burdette.

The Harry Breeden property, in Brentsville, has been sold to C. C. Cordell.

A shower was given for Mrs. Vivian Payne on April 4<sup>th</sup> at the home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bennie Breeden. Many lovely gifts were received. The shower was given by Doris Stephens and Nancy Gollady.

Mrs. J. C. Bean is recovering from pneumonia, and Mr. Clyde Bean and his son, James Bean, are staying with her.

Along with the buds, Easter eggs and things, the beautiful weather has also brought out our annual spring guest, Mr. Robert Fairfax Birch, of Washington and New York. Mr. Birch, by the way, is our idea of the perfect country house-guest. On entering the front door he pauses not, nor stays he, but walk straight through to the tool shed, finds the saw where it is hiding under ten layers of Department of Agriculture pamphlets, and immediately, without any superfluous conversation, commences pruning the fruit trees. We consider this a great improvement over the type of guest who says "Ah . . . what invigorating country air!" and then falls flat on his back into the nearest patch of lawn and expects to be waited on, hand and foot. Then there is the sort who expects sparkling wit served up with the eggs at 9 a.m.; THAT I think is the most repulsive form of guest, although the kind who is allergic to insects and promptly gets bitten by bees and ants and spiders is also pretty trying. Mr. Birch never gets bitten by anything, and when he is tired of pruning trees he goes into the house, sits down at the piano, and plays Chopin. When he runs out of Chopin he plays his own compositions and sings, and the only fault I have to find with that is for weeks afterward the children, who are naturally imitative, play THEIR own compositions, and sing. "Uncle Bob does it," they say indignantly as I haul them away. But somehow it doesn't sound like Uncle Bob.

Yours,

Agnes Webster

Source: The Manassas Messenger – Letter From Brentsville, April 11, 1947

## Where WILD things live...

### Madagascar Periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*)

*Catharanthus* is a genus of flowering plants in the dogbane family commonly known as periwinkles. There are eight known species, seven of which are endemic to Madagascar although *C. roseus* is widely naturalized around the world. It is a short evergreen subshrub or herbaceous plant. The leaves are oval to oblong, glossy green, hairless, with a pale midrib and a short petiole; they are arranged in opposite pairs. The flowers are white to dark pink with a darker red center.

The species has long been cultivated for herbal medicine and as an ornamental plant. In Indian traditional medicine the extracts of its roots and shoots, though poisonous, is used against several diseases. In traditional Chinese medicine, extracts from it have been used against numerous diseases, including diabetes, malaria, and Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Researchers investigating its medicinal properties discovered that it contained a group of alkaloids that, though extremely toxic, had potential uses in cancer treatment. Two of these alkaloids can be used in purified form to treat common types of leukemia and lymphoma. This discovery is credited with raising the survival rate of childhood leukemia from under 10% to over 90%. Thousands of children's lives have therefore been saved by an extract of this humble garden plant.

This conflict between historical indigenous use, and recent patents on *C. roseus*-derived drugs by western pharmaceutical companies, without

compensation, has led to accusations of bio piracy.

As an ornamental plant, it is appreciated for its hardiness in dry and nutritionally deficient conditions. It is noted for its long flowering period, throughout the year in tropical conditions, and from spring to late autumn, in warm temperate climates. Full sun and well-drained soil are preferred. Numerous cultivars have been selected, for variation in flower color (white, mauve, peach, scarlet and reddish-orange), and also for tolerance of cooler growing conditions in temperate regions.



Although the Madagascar periwinkle has a flower adapted to pollination by a long-tongued insect, such as a moth or butterfly, this species, unlike most in the family, is also able to self pollinate. Self compatibility and a relatively high tolerance of disturbance have enabled this species to spread from cultivation and naturalize in many parts of the world. As a consequence, this species is sometimes considered to be an invasive weed, although it does not normally proliferate sufficiently to eliminate native vegetation. The seeds of the Madagascar periwinkle are reportedly distributed by ants.

Source: Various Internet locations

# When WAR Came to Brentsville

ALEXANDRIA, VA., April 3, 1865.

(Received 7.10 p.m.)

Colonel J.H. TAYLOR,  
Assistant Adjutant-General:

COLONEL: Captain Pierson, First Michigan Cavalry, with his company, went on a scout toward Brentsville yesterday. To-day they returned, bringing seven prisoners-guerrillas. The pickets report all quiet.

H.H. WELLS.

Joseph Hancock Taylor was born on January 26, 1836, in Kentucky. His uncle was President Zachary Taylor, his father's brother. With such illustrious forebearers it was doubtless no surprise when he was appointed to West Point from Maryland in 1852. He graduated 31st in the class of 1856.

Upon graduation, Taylor was assigned as a brevet second lieutenant to the 1st U.S. Cavalry on July 1, 1856, but didn't immediately join his regiment. He served at the Cavalry School for Practice, Carlisle, Pennsylvania from 1856 to 1857. He was promoted to Second Lieutenant in the 1st Cavalry while at Carlisle on January 16, 1857. He joined his regiment later in what would be a very busy year for both he and the regiment. After quelling Kansas disturbances and escorting the



commissioner for running the southern boundary of Kansas, he spent the remainder of the year conducting other scouting from Fort Leavenworth. By the end of the year, the regiment was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas.

The remaining years before the outbreak of the Civil War were spent crisscrossing the frontier. Taylor participated in the Utah expedition in 1858, returning to first Fort Leavenworth, then Fort Riley later in the year. 1859 brought a march to the Arkansas River. Taylor's 1860 began with a march conducting recruits to Texas, then

expeditions against Kiowa and Comanche Indians. He was engaged near Bent's Fort, Colorado on July 11, 1860 with his company. They remained in the vicinity after the skirmish, one of the four companies who constructed and

dwelt in Fort Wise, Colorado under Major John Sedgwick that winter.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Taylor's company was one of those immediately ordered east. They marched first to Leavenworth, then to Washington. Taylor was promoted to First Lieutenant in his regiment on April 22, 1861.

Three weeks later he was promoted again, this time to Captain in the newly-forming 3rd U.S. Cavalry on May 14, 1861. The regiment was redesignated the 6th U.S. Cavalry on August 3rd, and he took command of Company F on August 22, 1861. He remained with the company through their training and marches to first Bladensburg, Maryland and then Camp East of the Capitol, Washington.

One of the privates in his company, Sidney Morris Davis, left his impression of his first commanding officer in his memoirs. He described Captain Taylor as "a small-waisted, slightly built, cross-looking man, with a voice that astonished us — so fierce, and sounding so like the yelp of a bull-dog when he gave us orders on drill. Although our first impression of Captain Taylor was not assuring, yet time showed he was one of the kindest officers in the service."

Taylor remained with the regiment until late November, 1861. He left his company on November 27, 1861 to serve as an acting assistant Adjutant General for General Edwin V. Sumner's Division. This assignment isn't too surprising when one considers that Sumner had been his regimental commander in the 1st Cavalry. He remained on General Sumner's staff until March 14, 1862, when he was assigned as the acting assistant Adjutant General of the Second Corps, Army of the Potomac. He served with the Second Corps in this role throughout the Peninsula battles, earning a brevet to Major of volunteers on June 1, 1862 for gallant and meritorious service in the battle of Fair Oaks.

After a month's sick leave of absence from June 24th to July 24th, he returned to his position with the Second Corps. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, Staff, of Volunteers on August 20, 1862, and earned a brevet to Lieutenant Colonel, U.S.A., on September 17, 1862 for gallant and meritorious service in the battle of Antietam. He remained with Second Corps until November 1862, when he was assigned as the assistant Adjutant General for the Right Grand Division. After the battle of Fredericksburg, he returned to the cavalry, albeit still as a staff officer.

He served as the Assistant Inspector General of Cavalry during Stoneman's Raid, from April 29 to May 8, 1863. Following the raid, he was reassigned as an assistant Adjutant General for the Department of Washington on June 1, 1863, where he served the remainder of the war.

On May 24, 1869, Major Taylor left Washington at last, serving as the Assistant Adjutant General (AAG), Department of the South, until December 6, 1873. He then served as the AAG, Department of Texas (January 30, 1874 to February 4, 1878), the AAG, Department of the East (February 11, 1878 to March 31, 1879), the AAG, Department of the South (April 1, 1879 to September 1, 1882), and the AAG, Department of the Platte.

Taylor was still serving with this last department when he died due to an unnamed disease that he contracted in the line of duty in Omaha, Nebraska on March 13, 1885. He is buried with his wife at Arlington National Cemetery.

His photo used here is from a group portrait taken of General Sumner and his staff at Warrenton, VA in November 1862.

Source: <http://crossedsabers.blogspot.com/2008/02/fiddlers-green-joseph-h-taylor.html>



# The Missing Keys

*The Weekly Star*, a little newspaper published by DeLancey Webster and myself, but substantially propped up by Mrs. Agnes Webster, carried a cartoon in the February 7, 1955, edition that is reproduced here. The caption came very close to the truth at that time (Joe and Walter Keys were brothers living in Brentsville). I have not tried to count just how many Keys families there were then but the number was large.



Today, quite a different story. Not a single Keys family lives in Brentsville. Oh yes, there are descendants still here but not by the name of Keys. Food for thought – just why not? Sounds like a story forming, doesn't it? Why not look over the family and see if there is a logical answer?

Most of us will agree that the Brentsville Keys families probably started with Robert Allen Keys. He was born between Dumfries and Independent Hill. He married Margaret Cornwell in Alexandria on April 5, 1862, who gave birth to their first son, John Thomas Keys almost a year later. More research is needed to determine exactly when he moved to Brentsville. We know he purchased a five acre parcel from Joseph B. Reid in May, 1894, but this was after his

six children were born. Let's look at them individually—there were four boys, John Thomas, James Mifflin, Robert Hilman and Lafayette. Also two girls Annette and JAnnette. For the purpose of this story I will not track daughters because they would not have children with the last name of Keys.

First, John Thomas: Married in 1888 to Catherine Patton, they had nine children, all born in Brentsville with the possible

exception of the first, John Robert, who only lived to be five years old so we will discount him. Of the eight remaining children, two died at birth and one, Minnie, a daughter—all discounted. The oldest son, Herbert Franklin, lived in Brentsville until 1921 and during that time he had four children, a daughter and three sons. Two of the sons lived less than a year and the other moved away from Brentsville with his parents in 1921 and never returned. The second living son, Walter Wildman, married and had only one daughter. Next, Joseph Clarence, had six children, four of whom were born in Brentsville. Of the six, the first son died at less than one year and there were two daughters. Two of the remaining sons, Nelson and Raymond were both married but had no children. The youngest

# The Brentsville Colored School

By Morgan Breeden

Probably all of us know about one or more of the public schools in Brentsville for the white youth. But how much do we know about a public school in Brentsville for the colored youth? I had heard about one but had never talked with anyone who had first hand knowledge of it's existence. Nelson Keys told me where he thought it was but it turns out that location was close but not accurate. Something worth checking into.

In an effort to learn more about the Brentsville schools I undertook the challenge of transcribing the School Board Minutes which are found in the county public schools Office of Records Management. Anyone interested in browsing through them can find the ones completed to date at <http://www.historicprincewilliam.org/schools/index.html>. In doing so, I started to find information about Brentsville District School #10 – or the Brentsville colored school. Not much information is found outside these records so suffice it to say that much of the following information is extrapolated from those records.

I'm not sure when the first class of colored students formed or who their teacher was but I do know that by July, 1908, school was being held in one room of the home of Rev. Richard Jackson, Pastor of the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, located just to the left of where Spicer Keys made his home in Brentsville.\* That month the school board ordered "...that the Brentsville colored school be continued the coming time and that will pay the teacher 25.00 per month and 10.00 for wood provided they furnish a building and make a lawful average." The lawful average was at least 15 students. And clearly that must have happened because two years later the county was making improvements

to the space used for this school. June 21, 1910: "It was resolved to remove six (6) of the best desks from the Allendale school house and place them in the colored school building at Brentsville and also to remove the old blackboard from the Bristow school house to the said colored school building." In addition, "It was decided to pay Rev. Jackson ten dollars for the use of his house at Brentsville for school purposes during the school term of 1909-10." Not much rent for a school but at least better than nothing.

We know that during this time Smith Moore, a 50 year old black man was given a contract to furnish wood for this school at \$10.00. Mr. Moore and his wife, Louisa, lived in Brentsville along with four of their children and three grandchildren—all school age and possible students.

By the summer of 1910 the school board was actively looking for a teacher for the colored school at Brentsville. Also during this time a census of school age children was taken in all school districts with Brentsville District reporting 434 white and 65 colored children of school age—between 7 and 21 years. By the start of the school year "It was ordered that ten desks be removed from Allendale School house into the house at Brentsville used for the colored school." and the board "Employed C. M. Waller, of Catletts, to teach the Brentsville Colored School provided he comply with the legal requirements before taking charge of said school." And Rev. Jackson received another \$8.10 for the use of his room.

In May, 1911, the school board appointed R. H. Davis and J. R. Cooke to look into procuring land, if possible, for a colored school.

Two month later it was reported that "Rev. R. Jackson (colored) had agreed to sell a piece of land (one acre more or less) to be used for colored school for \$45.00" but his offer was tabled for further consideration. Once again C. M. Waller was appointed teacher of the school at \$30.00 per month. The county would continue to pay Rev. Jackson rent on the room he was providing for the school.

In early 1912, R. H. Davis was again appointed to find a site for the colored school but in March he reported that so site had yet been found for that purpose. The school continued in the home of Rev. Jackson with C. M. Waller teacher during the 1912-13 and 1913-14 school years, paid at the rate of \$35.00 per month.

Finally on January 16, 1914, "R. H. Davis reported that Richard Jackson has agreed to sell the lot on which the old Colored Church at Brentsville is located (one acre more or less) for the sum of \$25.00 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. It was resolved that these terms be accepted and the business concluded as soon as possible." Now the students would actually have a school to call their own. In September, 1914, Miss Ella V. Crowell was appointed to teach the new Brentsville colored school at a salary of \$30.00 per month.

During the Spring of the following year (1915), "R. H. Davis was appointed to inspect the vestibule recently built at the Brentsville Colored School and also to see if the attendance at said school justified continuing another half month." He quickly reported back that "... attendance at Brentsville colored school was not sufficient to justify extending term. Also reported patrons of said school had agreed to paint the building if board would furnish paint. It was agreed that this be done." Just before school started that year, "The Clerk reported that Ella V. Crowell was sick and unable to open the

Brentsville colored school on time. Clerk was authorized to secure a substitute teacher for this school for one month if possible & to secure a regular teacher if Miss Crowell is not available in that time." A short time later, "Miss Amanda Hamilton, colored, who had been acting as substitute teacher of Brentsville Colored School, was appointed regular teacher to finish the term."

For the school year 1916-17, Miss Lulu V. Higginbotham was appointed teacher at \$30.00 per month. The Board "resolved to contract with white teachers for seven months and colored for six months" and they agreed to open all schools on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1916. Miss Higginbotham was again appointed teacher for the 1917-18 school year but she declined and Miss Cordelia Jennings was appointed in her place.

It is interesting to note that the colored population of Brentsville had been in a constant decline since the turn of the century. The New Hope Missionary Baptist Church was founded in February, 1889, but by 1903 nearly all of her members had moved from Brentsville. In a petition to the Circuit Court of Prince William County, Virginia, the trustees of the church stated "that only one member of the said Church now remains at or near the said Church and but very few colored people now reside in the vicinity ."

This exodus was also impacting the colored school. In June, 1918, "Mr. R. H. Davis was appointed a committee to look into the advisability & practicability of conveying colored children from Brentsville to Kettle Run provided a legal average can not be maintained at Brentsville colored school." A short time later he "... reported that after investigation, there did not seem to be enough pupils to justify opening Brentsville colored school, but thought it possible to get the pupils conveyed to Kettle Run." At the same time, "Mr. Davis reported that considerable damage had been wantonly done to colored schoolhouse at Brentsville and he was instructed to look into the matter and have the



guilty party pay for the damage or have him prosecuted for the offence.”

It is believed that the colored children of Brentsville were required to attend school at Kettle Run starting with the 1918 Fall term because in May, 1919, “Luther Blackwell, colored, presented a statement to the Board claiming he had hauled colored children from Brentsville to Kettle Run for 63 days – statement filed for further consideration as to amount of compensation etc.” Two months later the School Board “decided to pay Luther Blackwell \$45.00 for transporting some colored children from Brentsville to Kettle Run.” In 1922 the desks from the Brentsville colored school were moved to Aden and the building sat empty until January, 1925, when the Board of Supervisors “was allowed the privilege of using the colored school building at Brentsville as a storage for tools etc. belonging to the roads of that District.” Finally, on June 10, 1925, “J R Cooke was authorized to apply to court for permission to sell the old Brentsville colored school house property.”

And so another chapter in the history of Brentsville came to a close.

\* Lucy Phinney in her book, *Yesterday’s Schools*, also states that this is a home owned by Rev. Jackson but the more I think about it the more it seems that it was built as a parsonage for the pastor of the church but perhaps never used for that purpose. Their first minister, Reverend Lewis Bailey lived in Occoquan and most likely traveled to Brentsville to conduct services here. He was followed by Rev. Jackson who was, according to church history, “a bachelor and spent most of his life in and around the Catlett, Virginia area.” This is supported by the fact that Rev. Jackson does not appear in either the 1900 or the 1910 Prince William census. It is clear that Rev. Jackson collected rent for the school but it is not clear if it was his money or the church’s money.

son, Douglas, had one daughter who lives in Brentsville (not a Keys now that she is married) and one son who does not live in Prince William. John Thomas’ next son, James Wesley, was never married and died from gas poison received during WW-I. The last son, Cassius (“Cash”) had one daughter and one son, neither of whom lived in Brentsville as an adult.

The next son of Robert Allen, James Mifflin (“Miff”) had six boys and a girl but three of the boys only lived to be four years old and the last son lived only one day. Of the two remaining sons, James Mifflin, Jr. married and had five children, all girls except for the first who was a son that died in childbirth. The remaining son, Walter Lee, married but had no children.

Robert Allen’s third son, Robert Hilman, had nine children: six boys and three daughters. The first son, George Dewey, had a son who died at childbirth and a daughter. The second son died a few days old while the third and fourth sons, David and Kenneth, never married. The fifth son, Maurice, had a son and a daughter, neither of whom had children. And the youngest son, Lloyd, had only one daughter.

Robert’s fourth son, Lafayette, had two sons, one of whom died at birth. The other, Spicer, had two sons and two daughters. The first son died at birth and the second never married.

I fear this might have been hard to follow but if you look closely, it will show how Brentsville went from “Because we have so many Keys!” to Wow, there just aren’t any left!

# 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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