

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.



Olde Worlde Quality and Service!

<http://www.houseofdoors.com>

Inside
washingtonpost

washingtonpost.com | [home page](#) | [site index](#) | [search](#) | [help](#) |

Historic Brentsville Is Poised for a Renaissance

Preservationists, County Plan to Build Village's Future Around Its Past

By Dan Eggen
Washington Post Staff Writer
Sunday, October 19, 1997; Page V03
The Washington Post

Living in Prince William County
Section: community news and information, recent home sales, crime reports and more.

Washington World Section:
Metro news, community information, entertainment listings and reviews, local economy news and local sports.

All Virginia Weekly stories from Thursday's Washington Post.

The little village of several hundred was once the center of Prince William County, boasting homes, taverns, a courthouse, a jail and a bustling public square -- complete with gallows and whipping post.

But historic Brentsville has fallen hard in the nearly two centuries since its inception, crumbling into a huddle of neglected and nearly forgotten buildings.

Now, preservationists, county officials and the park authority are joining together in a rare alliance to save old Brentsville -- and to possibly rebuild the village entirely.

Prince William and the state each have allocated \$25,000 toward the effort, and the Park Authority and Board of County Supervisors both are poised to approve a committee to plan and build for Brentsville's future.

No details have been decided yet, but supporters say the possibilities range from assembling a modest collection of 19th-century buildings to recreating a historic village in the spirit of Colonial Williamsburg.

"It's a perfect place for a day trip out of Washington or to tie into the other tourism options in the county," said Jan Cunard, chairwoman of the Friends of the Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre, a citizens group. "We've still got to look at exactly how much we want to develop, but the possibilities are wonderful."

Old Brentsville, located on Bristow Road near Brentsville Road, was Prince William's fourth county seat, serving in that role from 1822 until 1894, when the railroad lured the seat to Manassas. The 56-acre village was a thriving county center until it was ravaged and plundered during the Civil War, historians say, after which began a long

decline.

"It kind of went into disuse over the years," said Supervisor Loring B. "Ben" Thompson (R-Brentsville).

What survived are four buildings of particular note: the original courthouse, the original jail, a 20th-century one-room schoolhouse built on the foundation of the original clerk of court building and Brentsville Union Church, a 125-year-old parish that the county purchased earlier this month for \$26,000.

The latter caught the attention of new County Executive Bern Ewert, a fan of old buildings who worked on two major historic districts in Roanoke. While house hunting in Prince William shortly after being hired this year, Ewert said, he came across the little church and fell in love with it.

"I thought it was a very interesting building, and I even looked into buying it for myself, as a place to live," Ewert said.

That never happened. But when the church went on the market, Ewert and the county jumped -- eventually reaching a settlement with the owner that halted plans to move the building out of Prince William altogether.

"It's very hard to find historic, abandoned churches," Ewert said. "It's much easier to find historic, abandoned barns or homes or other buildings, but not churches. It was important to keep it here."

Now it must be decided what to do next. Cunard said renovation of the courthouse will begin immediately, but the fate of the rest of the district still is under discussion. The soon-to-be-formed committee of county officials, Park Authority representatives and residents eventually will come up with a long-range village plan with the help of original maps of the area.

Meanwhile, on Nov. 1, the buildings will be open to the public as part of a yard sale and food fair.

"Whatever we do, I think it should probably be historical and educational," Cunard said. "They had themselves a miniature Williamsburg here. Maybe we can do that again."

© Copyright 1997 The Washington Post Company

[Back to the top](#)

washingtonpost.com
| home page | site index | search | help |

