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Brentsville court day—fun filled family activities with 19th century flavour

By TERRY KARNES
Observer Staff

Step back more than 150 years to experience what life was like around the county courthouse during this year's Wild Western Prince William County Farm Tour on Saturday, Sept. 28.



Friends of the Brentsville district courthouse centre, in a unique partnership with the Farm Tour, will host visitors with a special "re-enactment" of the typical court day in Brentsville.

The Brentsville courthouse, which was the county seat from 1822 to 1894, turns 180 years old this year, said Friends chairman, Pamela Sackett.

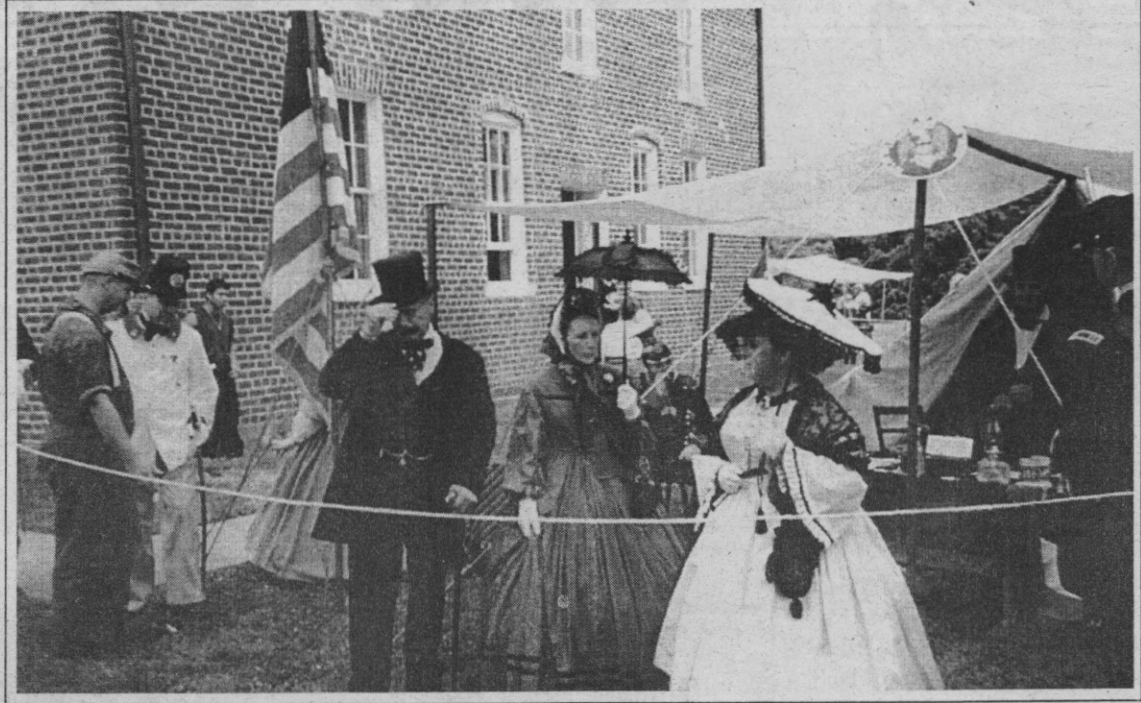
While the farm tour will be held Sept. 28 and 29, and the courthouse centre is a stop on the tour both days, only Sept. 28 will the site be transformed into a court day of years past. There will be many family activities on Sept. 28 including 19th century children's games and music on the "public lot." The site on

verdicts announced.

In the early 19th century all residents went to the courthouse to vote, she said. "We are giving little glimpses of what life might have looked like then." At noon there will be a lunch served and a 180th ceremony in honor "of that milestone in the building's history," she said.

Volunteers will read quotes from people who lived in Brentsville the past 180 years. Called "Voices of Brentsville, these have been taken from diaries and other public documents. "These will be chronologically ordered sayings that hopefully when pulled together will tell the story of Brentsville," Sackett said. That commemoration will culminate with the ringing of the bell on the courthouse.

Tours of the entire site will also be conducted including the six historic structures in various stages of historic restoration -the courthouse, the one-room school house, the jail, the Brentsville Union Church, the



Step back more than 150 years to experience what life was like around the county courthouse in Prince William on this year's wild western PWC farm tour on Sept. 28. This is a scene at a Brentsville Court Day, courtesy of Friends of Brentsville Courthouse



ology team to have students help with the researching of the area as well as to perform an archeological dig this fall, Sackett said. "It has been a great asset for our organization," she said. Flint was found at the site during a previous dig that Sackett says dates to 5000 years ago as well as glassware from the area where the tavern was located. Evidence of a blacksmith on site has also been found, she said.

Meanwhile, the possible founda-

tion hopes to have the site open to the public daily in 12-18 months time. "The board of county supervisors is very excited and committed to have that happen," she said.

The Friends meet the second Thursday of the month at the one-room school house at 7 p.m. The group is open to everyone, not just those who live in or near Brentsville. The next meeting is Sept. 12.

"We strongly believe everyone in Prince William who is interested

which the courthouse is situated is referred to as the "public lot," Sackett said. A "Yankee School Marm" will teach lessons in the one-room schoolhouse adjacent to the courthouse.

Another re-enactor will be "Uncle Jed" who will talk about his family's transition from slavery. There will be soldiers on site in both Confederate and Union uniforms and a historic interpreter will give lessons in herbal medicine.

Sackett said the goal is to give the perspective of what a typical court day was like and a court day "was any day that the courthouse was open, whether to make decisions about roads or for a trial," she said. Residents would come from all across the county, even if they didn't have business that day in court so they could gossip with their neighbors, buy or sell merchandise or hear



Photo courtesy Friends of Brentsville Courthouse

Students who actually attended the one room school at the historic Brentsville site will have a reunion Sept. 28, as they did several years ago as shown in this photo

smokehouse and the 19th century log cabin. Tours of the sites will be available on the farm tour on Sept. 29, though re-enactors will not be present.

The Friends, a non-profit organization, is going into its seventh year, and began as a grass-roots organization to save these historical structures, Sackett said. It now has more than 100 active volunteers.

From the Friends grew the Brentsville Historic Centre Trust which is a partnership with the county, the Friends and the Prince William Park Authority to collect and administer the financial aspects of preserving the site. "The county has been extremely supportive," Sackett said.

Recently, Friends partnered with the Hilton High School arche-

tion of a building behind the courthouse was recently discovered. In upcoming months, Friends will be looking into what that might have been.

Renovations need to be completed for the Brentsville Union Church to be open and the log cabin still needs to be moved to its site on the property. Sackett said that she

in history [can] be involved in this process" of restoring the site, Sackett said. "That's the key to our success - citizen involvement."

Also, those with any information about life in Brentsville during the 19th or early 20th century are asked to share that information by calling 703-792-6191.

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