



*Journal Messenger Photo by Bennie Scarton Jr.*

**Brentsville residents have banded together to save the historic fourth Prince William Courthouse at Brentsville from further deterioration.**

# Historic courthouse rotting, community group tries to save it

**By BENNIE SCARTON JR.**  
JM Assistant Editor

One of Prince William County's most historical complexes — the Brentsville courthouse, jail and schoolhouse — is deteriorating and a group has been formed to try to save it.

The fourth Prince William County Courthouse was built from 1820 to 1822, when the county seat was moved from Dumfries to Brentsville, a more central location.

Both the courthouse and adjacent jail were built on a three-acre parcel set aside for public purposes when

Brentsville was established in 1822.

Since the courthouse was moved to Manassas in 1893, the building has been used as a school (from 1893-1913), a mattress factory (1941) and a community center (from the late 1930s to 1973).

The three buildings are now mostly vacant, with a Park Authority ranger making limited use of the jail and the county maintenance department using a portion of the schoolhouse.

The Park Authority had its offices in the complex until moving to new quarters several years ago on Bristow Road.

A group of county residents wanting to preserve the complex approached Brentsville Supervisor L. Ben Thompson earlier this year, and in June he appointed a seven-person "Committee for the Restoration for the Brentsville Courthouse."

That committee has held several exploratory sessions on how best to restore and maintain the historic area.

It will meet again this Thursday at 7 p.m. in the courthouse. The public is invited to attend.

"This is our first major attempt at gathering ideas for what to do with

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## Courthouse

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the area," said Jan Cunard, committee chairman. "We would like to have area residents join the committee for a brainstorming session on how best to keep from losing this gorgeous old landmark."

The buildings are fairly isolated, which committee feels may attract vandals. The buildings, in addition, are deteriorating much more quickly than if they were being used.

A member of the committee, James Evans, said, "Considerable deterioration has already occurred over the past winter around the foundation of the courthouse and to its interior walls and floors."

He continued: "We don't want to let this continue to happen to this unique set of buildings which means so much to our community. These buildings are an important part of our heritage — the history of what once was the county seat of our very old and interesting county. We want to protect the ambiance of everyday life in a quiet agricultural area before it is lost forever."

The committee has discussed creating a historic village in the open area behind the courthouse complex in which it could display items reflective of the early days in Brentsville.

It has also considered the possibility of opening up the courthouse and grounds for weddings and meetings, as well as fixing up the schoolhouse so it can be used for meetings and for teaching area school children how students from an earlier era learned their lessons.

Evans said he would like to see mannequins dressed up as judges, teachers and jailers placed in the old buildings to help demonstrate their past history. "We could then open the buildings for educational tours for our school children," he added.

Thompson said he will attend the Thursday meeting to hear suggestions on the restoration of the three buildings.