

"Brentsville Neighbors" Jan. 2006

## Featured Brentsville Building

### The Brentsville Store

#### Remembering the Brentsville Store

Gladys (Wolfe) Eanes doesn't remember spending much time at the store when it was operated by the original owner, Robert Hilman Keys (everyone called him Hilman). When she was a young girl, it was mostly the men who went there. It was the gathering place for the men of Brentsville – outside on the porch in the summer and inside around the stove in the winter. You could almost always find someone playing a game of checkers or simply sitting there with a smoke and talking about the events of the day. Mr. Irvin Spitzer died suddenly while sitting on the porch with other local men. Kenny Bradshaw was there at the time and it was he who took Mr. Spitzer's hat and other few belongings back to Mrs. Annie Spitzer to give her the sad news.

With some embarrassment Gladys remembers Hilman giving her father (Clyde Wolfe) the old candy to feed his bees but somehow, most of the candy never made it to the hives.

Joyce (Keys) Smith remembers the store still being operated by Hilman (her great uncle) in the late 1930's while she was going to school in Brentsville. Then in the early 1940's, her father, James Mifflin Keys, Jr. ran the store for a while. We understand it was then operated by Myrtle (Keys) Landis (Hilman's oldest daughter) for a while before it was eventually taken over by Violet and Grady.

Violet (Hilman's second daughter) and Grady Shoemaker were married in 1925. At first they lived in a little red building just behind where Grady was building their "big" house. The little building eventually became the henhouse. When they took over the store (we are still researching the exact date) things didn't change much – not at first anyhow. The store was situated very close to the Hilman Keys home with a very small alley-way between the two buildings. You could go from the store into the house without getting wet. Grady eventually moved the store to where it is now located and he and Violet operated it there for many years until his death in July 1964.

Violet was known as a very compassionate lady and would let the locals run a tab to be paid at the end of the week or month – whatever worked. This was a typical country store complete with a cheese wheel (give me a dime's worth, please). Coke was a nickel as was a scoop of ice cream. Bread was only 20 cents.

You could still buy candy for a penny and the kids took full advantage of that! And when it could be afforded, a bottle of coke with peanuts was a special treat.

Off to the side of the main room was a little store room where the stock of unsold stuff was stored. She walked from her home to the store every morning and back home in the evening. A number of different people worked in the store during this time including Lillie (Molair) Keys and others.

In November 1964, Catherine Corner purchased the store from Violet. Catherine recalls she had been in retail for over ten years and when she heard that the store was for sale, she talked it over with Violet and decided to start her own business. One of her first actions was to name it The Brentsville Superette.

"When I first got it I went in and rearranged the counters to make it more convenient to work. Then I painted it a light pink because I didn't like the color. Moving everything off the shelves and painting the walls was quite a chore!" reports Catherine. At first she didn't have sufficient established credit to buy the stock so she had to pay cash for everything. As a result of this, she could no longer extend credit to her customers. "Several people got angry but they got over it and came back to continue dealing with me" she said.

The store was already selling gasoline and kerosene when Catherine bought it and she thought it would be good to also sell beer. After about six months she applied for an ABC license which was issued by the state.

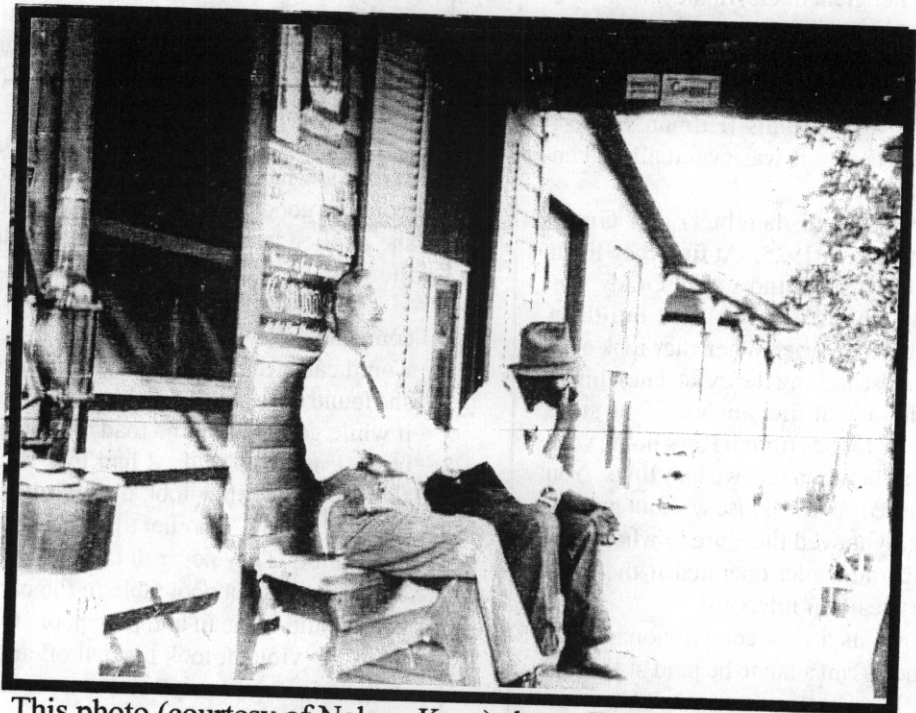
She remembers that occasionally kids would come in and try to take stuff like candy. Generally she would catch them and it would stop at that. One day she found out a boy had stolen ice cream and was eating it while going down the road after leaving. Thinking back, Catherine said, "I had four break-ins and was robbed. Once they took all my old coins that I had been collecting. Another time they took cigarettes and other stuff. They never did find out who broke in. At one point I had a pool table in the back room and the boys would come in and play pool. Once I remember a boy got violent, took his belt off and tried to hit me with it. I used the small end of a pool stick on his head and he backed off."

After 10 years she sold the store to George Reaves because there were several instances of store

Continued on Page 7

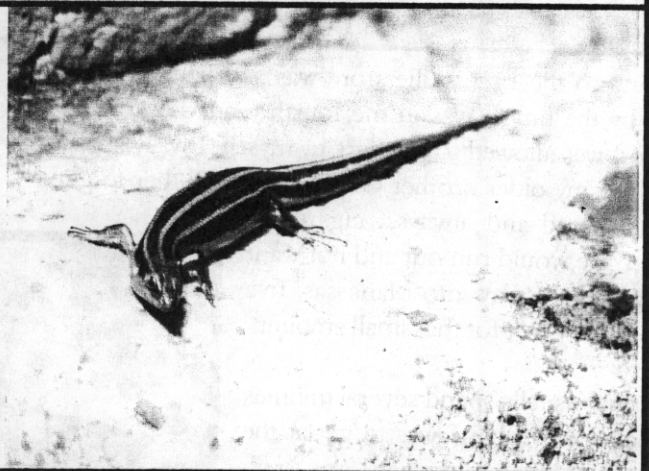


**Featured Brentsville Building**  
The Brentsville Superette

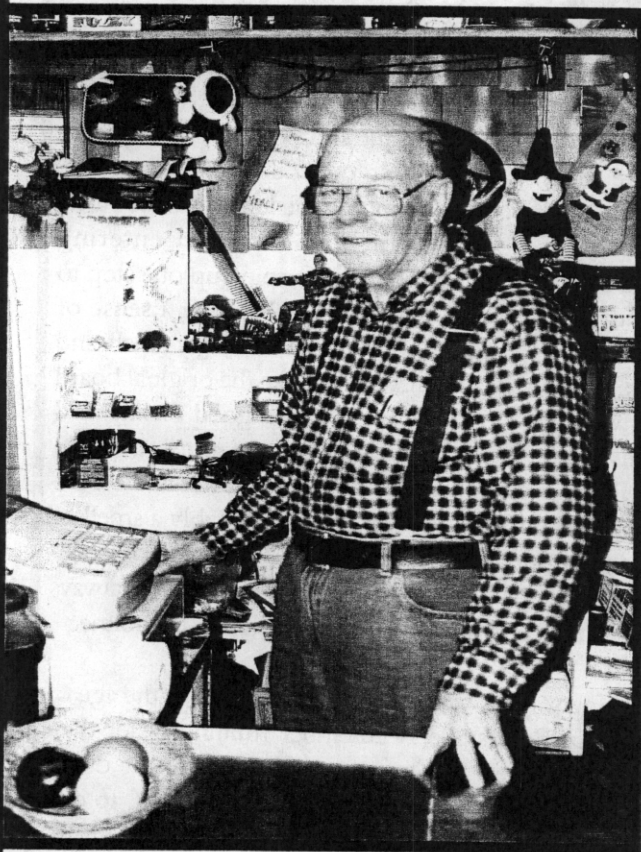


This photo (courtesy of Nelson Keys) shows Robert Hilman Keys sitting with Jim Black on the front porch of the Brentsville Store. Hilman built this store and the home to the right where he lived and raised his family.

## WHERE WILD THINGS LIVE



**The Five-lined Skink is our most common lizard. What makes the one on the left different from the one on the right? I'll bet you guess wrong! See page 7 for information.**



George Reaves working in his Brentsville Store

ADD  
SHOEMAKERS STORE SAVINGS  
JANCO Italian Spaghetti.....15¢ can  
Instant pudding.....12¢ box  
Kellogg's Sugar Pops.....10¢ box  
Packaged Garden Seeds.....10¢ & up

This is an advertisement that was run in the Weekly Star during 1955. Have you seen any packaged garden seeds for a dime lately?

**“GOING TO THE BRENTSVILLE STORE” WAS WRITTEN BY JULIET AGNES WEBSTER “IN HER OWN WORDS” DURING FEBRUARY 2003. JULIET NOW LIVES IN LOS ANGELES WHERE SHE TEACHES SPECIAL EDUCATION.**

Going to the Brentsville store was a special treat for me by the time I was in the fourth grade because by then I was allowed to go there by myself. I was usually sent by my older brother Gill or by my Mother to get milk, bread and always... cigarettes, when we would run out and not want to go all the way into Manassas, five miles away, just for that small amount.

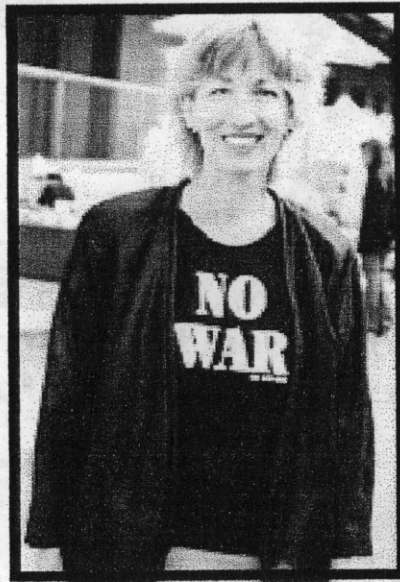
I would usually spend several minutes memorizing what I was to get at the store and being told what I was to do if one store didn't have what we needed. Secretly I always hoped that if Shoemaker's store would NOT have everything, I would have to go across the road to Steven's store. Sometimes Mother would jot down in pencil a list, on a torn piece of brown paper bag, and I would remember repeating the list out loud, just to make sure that I would get it right when I got there. Of course, when there was no list and only

a few items, I would repeat those few things over and over again, both in my head and out loud, all the way to the store, to make sure I would remember them. The exact amount of change was usually given to me and that was counted out at least twice. I remember that a loaf of bread was a quarter and so was a quart of milk. Sometimes we were allowed to say to Mrs. Shoemaker, "please put it on our bill."

The road then was a mixture of dirt and gravel and the challenge of getting to the store was knowing exactly where to step, in order to feel the least amount of pain on my callused but still sensitive, dusty bare feet. I always tried to run as fast as I could down to where the store property started, the parking lot.

When I reached the store, I had to be especially careful to place my feet in just the right places. I wanted to avoid, if possible, any broken bits of glass, bottle-caps, that I might want to pick up and put in my pocket, and any little special treasures that might be dropped by

mistake and mixed into the driveway area in front of the store. I tried very hard to walk as normal looking as I could for too much careful walking would look to others that I was not used to walking. I wanted to be like the other kids whose feet bottoms were much tougher than mine.



Sometimes the store wouldn't have any brown bread and Mother wouldn't let us eat white bread so I wouldn't buy any at all and I would return empty handed. She called white bread "rat killer" bread and would quote some study in a newspaper somewhere that said that when fed on a diet of white bread, mice in a laboratory would die but, mice fed on a diet of only brown bread, would live. That was enough to convince and terrify a ten year old into never eating the white stuff.

More often than not there was a delivery truck outside of the store or a car getting gas. There was a coke machine outside to the left of the store and a long bench running the length of the store, often with people sitting on it. Upon entering Shoemaker's store I remember stepping up one step to get into it, turning a doorknob and feeling a sense of history upon entering. The store was very small and dark, and the floorboards looked like the original board and were highly oiled. There was a good feeling and even a good smell in the store. Sometimes it was a smell of candy, which was near the counter and on the same level with my nose, but most probably a smell of garden food like homegrown strawberries or fresh tomatoes, depending on the season. People were always in the store and they seemed to be happy to see me.

Running was my way of getting places from the age of eight. In Brentsville I remember running faster than the wind to get... everywhere. I ran along the dusty, dirt road, kicking up a dirt trail behind myself, to one of the two country stores about nine car lengths away.

# FLASHBACK

Letter From Brentsville by Agnes Webster  
October, 1946

It was a beautiful afternoon, and Gladys Wolfe and I sat on the top step in front of our house, glaring at the approaching roadscraper. It inched along, piling the gravel into a neat center ridge that would scrape holes in the bottom of the next car that rashly tried to navigate that perilous stretch between Brentsville and Limstrong's Corner.

"Too bad," I murmured, thinking of my already battered exhaust pipe. Gladys, under the impression that I meant something else, replied "And I was hoping for a nice week end!" I recalled the local superstition that the appearance of the road-scraper means rain the next day. For five long years I have tried to catch that annoying vehicle in a lie and prove it wrong as another prophet, but never once has it missed!

Gladys had been bringing me up to date on the news; How Mr. Hedrick was seriously injured in an accident and is in the Alexandria Hospital; Mrs. B. W. Shoemaker has resigned her position with the Department of Agriculture, little Jennings Breeden swallowed an undetermined number of the puppy's Worm Pills, to the great alarm of his parents, but no great harm to himself.

"I see," said Gladys, pointing to my copy of the paper, "that you didn't have any column last week." "My spies are all out on strike," I told her gloomily, "Times are hard." And then, as I thumbed idly through, I was suddenly struck with the dismaying fact that there is neither a Poet's Corner nor an Epitaph Department in the otherwise adequate Messenger; Forthwith I left the step which was getting sort of cold anyway, and went into the house to repair this serious omission.

## LAMENT

Beneath this stone lies a simple wife,  
Robust toil was her lot;  
In the rough and tumble of wartime life  
She gave as good as she got.  
She fought for bananas and sugar and meat,  
She stood in lines till she had no feet;  
The lack of tires she took in her stride,  
And walked the miles that she used to ride.  
In short, her heart was strong as a rock  
As she carried her humble load,  
But they said, in Manassas, she died of SHOCK  
When they GRAVELLED THE BRENTSVILLE  
ROAD!

I would time myself by counting loudly in my head or even out loud, that seemed to help me get there quicker.

I ran along that same road some years later when it was in its many stages of being paved. This time fast running was a necessity because the tar was hot and sticky. If I stayed too long on one spot on the road a puddle of black tar would ooze between my toes and later be hard to get off. If I complained about the tar on the bottoms of my bare feet I might then have to explain why I had been on the road when I wasn't supposed to have been. Or I might be called upon to explain why I was in the front of the house by myself or on the road without supervision.

I would run, losing myself in thoughts that I was being chased. I would run so fast that I would often need to recover after reaching my destination. With the blending of the real and the fantasy it still remains a mystery as to whether I really WAS being chased or whether I was actually doing the chasing, chasing myself. Chasing and being chased became one, just a blur where fast running was concerned. With two older brothers however, and a town full of mischievous county boys, there was a good chance that at least some of the time someone actually WAS behind me.

Mailbox running was different. It was a race. It was just about the right distance away so not to get totally exhausted and on the same side of the road so we didn't have to cross the road. My brother usually won, he was two years older and his legs seemed two years longer. Sometimes I would actually beat him, coaxing him into giving me a head start because I was so much younger.

Once we got the mail which was in the string of mailboxes in front of the house opposite the one room schoolhouse, what is now Freddy Wolfe's house, we would run all the way home on the grass, excited to deliver it to our mother. I was usually left behind somewhere around the Wolfe's barn and would walk the rest of the way whining for my brother to... wait.

I would run from our terrace past the four apple trees to the chicken house when I was lucky enough to have my turn collecting the eggs. Running back with the eggs was not encouraged.

## Where W I L D Things Live

The Five-lined Skink is our most common lizard. They grow up to eight inches long, with males growing slightly larger than females. They are usually black or dark brown, with five light stripes down their backs. Stripes fade as the skink gets older, so adults may look all brown. Male adult Five-lined Skinks often have bright orange jaws during the breeding season. Young skinks have very clear stripes and a bright blue tail. Females may keep a very full bluish-gray tail as they age, but males' tails will turn brown.

Five-lined Skinks mate in the Spring and females will dig a nest under a log, stump, or rock. She will lay up to a dozen eggs, which will hatch between June and August, depending on when they were laid. Females will stay with their eggs until they hatch. She will also eat any unhatched eggs. Young Five-lined Skinks are about two inches long when born.

These lizards are found in moist woods where there are a lot of logs, stumps, and rockpiles to go along with leaf litter. Five-lined Skinks are diurnal, so they are active during the day. They like to crawl out on rocks or logs to bask (soak up heat from the sun) during the day. They are also always looking for a meal. Five-lined Skinks eat mostly insects, including: crickets, grasshoppers, beetles, and caterpillars. They also eat spiders, earthworms, snails, slugs, isopods, other lizards, and small mice. Five-lined Skinks will often climb dead trees where there are a lot of insects.

Predators of these lizards include Raccoons, Red Foxes, Virginia Opossums, snakes, and hawks. Five-lined Skinks help control insect pest populations. They are often seen climbing walls and shutters of houses looking for insects.

(Continued from page 2)

keepers being killed and she felt she was too young to die so decided to sell it. Shortly after that Louise Winslow at Bristow was killed in her store.

George remains the last and current owner. He purchased the store because it sold gasoline and kerosene. At the time he was working in real estate and was driving a big car that seemed to use a lot of gas as he went from place to place. George thought this would be a good way to get cheap gas but right about then there was a major gas shortage so it didn't work as well as he had hoped—but he stuck with it.

Around 1975 George removed the wall that separated the main room from the storage area. This was to make the store larger and make it feel more like a grocery store. The process of removing the wall also exposed the chimney which now stood bare in the middle of the room. George remembers "Jake" being very embarrassed with the way it looked since he was the one who had built it some years back. Because it was to be enclosed, he didn't take many pains with the masonry work. George told him it made it look old fashioned and Jake didn't feel so badly anymore.

Mrs. Elizabeth Bean (all the kids always called her "Granny" Bean) worked in the store for 15 years. She could look through a little hole into the back room where there was a pool table and one day she observed the tables being robbed twice in the same day! This was

too much for George and he had the tables removed. The room was converted into a deli and George sold sandwiches, chili and soup every day. Most days he would sell over 100 sandwiches taking them to the Iron and Steel Works in Gainesville and other places where construction was in progress. Many times IBM would call and order a large number of sandwiches for a special occasion. George claims he had a secret ingredient – he put MEAT on them! A lot of meat. His biggest challenge was keeping the Health Inspectors happy who seemed to have a different agenda on each visit. That was finally resolved and he was actually offered space in the basement of the new courthouse in Manassas to operate a deli there.

George sells chili and soup (about 10 different kinds) all year long with as many customers in the summer as in the winter. He also makes and sells home made BBQ with a lot of different seasonings but in particular, flavored with old-time syrup. He said that makes it good!

George doesn't sell gasoline anymore and you can't buy cigarettes or beer there either. But he hopes to get the kitchen back in order and perhaps have an even bigger and better deli than before. Want something good to eat? Stop in and see George – tell him we sent you!

A special "Thank You" to Buster Keyton -- we very much appreciate your support!