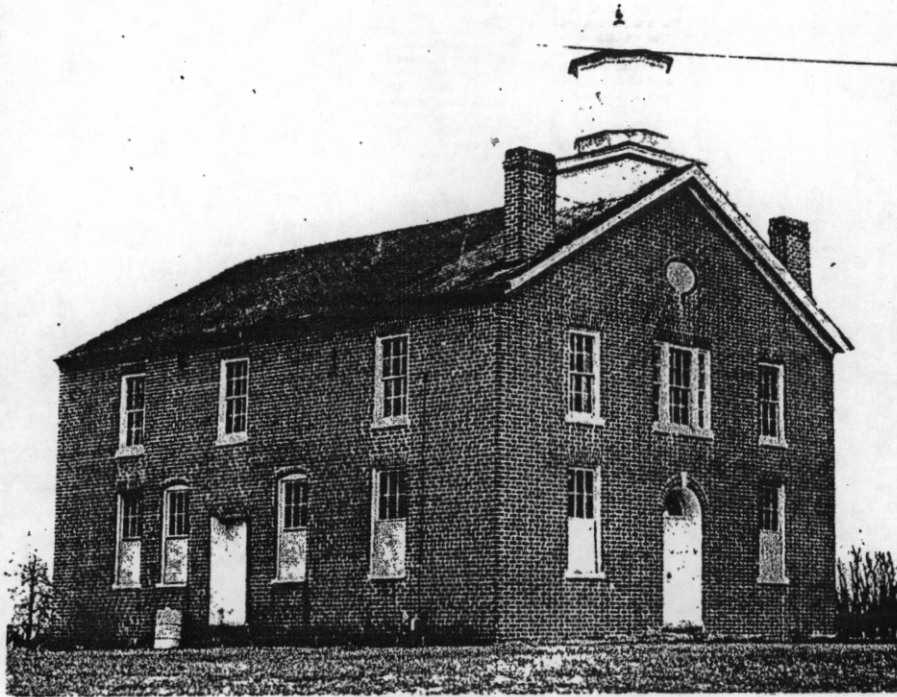


Brentsville Courthouse Has New Role in County



Tommye Burton Photo

Brentsville Courthouse

By TOMMYE S. BURTON

Brentsville's historic past will peaceably coexist with contemporary America when the crumbling courthouse complex is restored as a center for recreational activities.

Built in 1822, the Flemish bond red brick Brentsville Courthouse was the fourth of five Prince William County seats. It stands imposingly on 10 verdant acres with a brick jail of the same era and a quaint, white frame schoolhouse built early in the 1900s.

The buildings have deteriorated with the passage of time, and their use has diminished with the years. But that will all change with a major restoration project begun this spring by the county's department of parks and recreation.

Renovation of the little schoolhouse is nearly complete. Ultimately, it will be the focal point for youth activities. Meanwhile, it is being used as headquarters for a county-sponsored summer day camp.

The courthouse itself has been completely cleaned on the inside and is designated for use as a community meeting house. Interior improvements are still required. An application of waterproof coating on the brick exterior will prevent further interior damage.

The Community Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services (Chapter 10) Board has offices in the old jail. Its renovation is scheduled when the Chapter 10 Board relocates to offices in the new Didlake School under construction near Manassas Park.

A family of black snakes which feeds on roosting birds in the ceiling of the old jail will be relocated when the prison is repaired.

The historic recreation project is estimated to take three to five years to

complete. All three buildings have been reroofed with galvanized metal to prevent further water damage and to perpetuate the sound of singing raindrops.

In addition to restoring the buildings, parks and recreation plans to regrade an existing ball diamond and replace a backstop. Multi-purpose recreational courts will be constructed. A nature trail will be developed.

The nature path will be constructed in a manner to accommodate wheelchairs. Braille markers will allow the blind to identify flora and historically significant areas.

The old Brentsville well, the public water source, will regain a well house and a swinging bucket. A fence and turnstile once located on the property, will be rebuilt. Ghosts may haunt reconstructed gallows.

Brentsville Courthouse was the scene of two recorded hangings. In 1850 Agnes, a county slave woman, was hung for the murder of her master, Gerard Mason of Woodbridge.

Twenty-five years later, history recorded the hanging of Jesse Fouks, a freedman. When he was caught stealing food, Fouks confessed to murdering Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiah Herndon and a little black boy, Addison Russell.

Parks and recreation would like to acquire property adjacent to the courthouse complex for a small picnic area and wooded buffer zone. Attempts to contact W. H. Breeden, the owner of the property known as Tavern Square, have been futile. He is reportedly in Florida.

Over the years a number of interested persons have attempted to insure the survival of the Brentsville complex, abandoned in 1893 when the county seat was moved to Manassas.

A lawsuit produced a \$4,500 main-

tenance fund.

When Judge James Bankhead Thornton died in 1918, he left part of his property for a public swimming hole. Construction of the Lake Jackson Dam ruined the dipping spot. Community ire sparked the lawsuit against the dam owners. The successful litigation produced the maintenance fund.

About 1930 it was rumored that the School Board had plans to sell the old courthouse for scrap. Legend around Brentsville has it that Walter Keys, then a small boy, made a Paul Rever-type ride to Manassas to sound the alarm that saved the building.

At one time Brentsville area citizens raised \$600 to persuade the county supervisors to appropriate additional funds to repair the old structure.

The courthouse building was used for a school between 1893 and 1913. Mattresses were manufactured there in 1941. Periodically, it has been used as a public meeting place. In the 1960s, it was used as Didlake School for Retarded Children.

Through the years the School Board and Boards of Supervisors have appointed committees to oversee the complex.

The current committee members, Maureen Patina, Agnes Webster, LaVerne Flory, Jean Dunn and Gilbert Counts, will advise parks and recreation, which acquired the property by supervisor resolution in April.

This new concept in recreational planning is a bonus for taxpayers. Tax dollars are used to provide recreation while preserving the county's historical heritage. History shows it is unused buildings that collapse.

Only recreation which is compatible with the historic past at Brentsville will be permitted.

Stonewall

Charles Wildman will resign as principal of Stonewall Jackson Senior High School to take a research position in the school system's educational planning and staff development department.

His new appointment has been recommended by Prince William County School Superintendent Dr. Milton Snyder and will be considered by the School Board at its Aug. 7 meeting.

Effective Thursday, the Stonewall Jackson principal's job was open to interested applicants. Wildman will continue as principal until a replacement is named.

Wildman, in his new post, will be responsible for monitoring the school district's five-year plan, adopted by the School Board in June.

He has been with the school district since 1956 when he was assigned to Osbourn High School as a teacher and coach. While

there, he mathematics and football coach.

In 1962 he assistant principal Parkside Elementary Junior High School served in this post two years, and in 1964 he was appointed principal of Stonewall Jackson School, the year it opened.

Wildman received a bachelor's degree from Marshall University in 1958 and a master's from the University of Virginia. He has taken advanced work at Colgate and is currently taking graduate courses at the University of Virginia.

Wildman said he is "excited" about his new assignment.

In his new position, Wildman will work with school staffs, central staff, outside agencies and individuals in the school system's instructional program.

Parents' Orientation

Three Prince William County elementary schools have slated orientations for parents of kindergarten age children.

All elementary schools, on the traditional school calendar, plan to hold orientation sessions but only three schools have announced dates and times.

The schools include Elizabeth Vaughn, Monday, July 29, 8 p.m.; Yorkshire, Tuesday, July 30, 7:30 p.m.;

West Gate, Thursday, July 27, 8 p.m.

These sessions are for parents with children who will attend kindergarten in the fall and who live within the school's attendance area. Parents will be expected to discuss their concerns and

and time for other elementary school children will be announced in August.

Our Front

Newsletter

(Continued from Page A-1)

Initially, the four-page news sheet will appear monthly. Dabney says he hopes to have more frequent publication later.

The number of copies may increase, too, Dabney predicts, noting that the information, which began as a single line, now has three lines because of citizen use. More than 3,600 calls are placed to the info-phone each week, he said.

Prince William Perspective's first issue will feature articles on the 1974-75 county budget, former Dumfries Supervisor Dr. A. J. Ferlazzo, and the county's recently improved bond rating.

There will be a photo feature on the Dale City recreation center and on commuter rail. The supervisors will be shown in "official board portraits," and board chairman Charles J. Colgan will be the subject of a "personality sketch."

Other items include a statement on what the news sheet hopes to accomplish ("bridge information gaps that may currently exist," according to Dabney) and a summer swim schedule.

The sheet is scheduled to appear on or about Aug. 1. Dabney says copies will be available at both county libraries and county public offices.

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