

The following information is provided by Nelson Keys in his own words. Nelson was born in Brentsville. This article reflects on his early memories of Brentsville and attending school here.

My name is Nelson Joseph Keys, I was born February 16, 1926, to Joseph Clarence (Joe) and Ora Nettie (Heflin) Keys at 12404 Bristow road, Brentsville, Virginia at 1:A.M. with 4 inches of snow on the ground. I was delivered by Doctor Stewart McBride of Manassas, Va., and he stayed all night because of the roads. Most of the roads back then were dirt and gravel, but mostly dirt and full of ruts.

I had four brothers and two sisters. I was the first one born in our home in Brentsville, Va. My oldest brother and my oldest sister were born in Marshall, Va., because that is where our parents were living at that time. My oldest brother, Alfred Madison Keys was born October 21, 1922, and died a few months later on July 13, 1923 and was buried in Middleburg, Va., in the town cemetery. My oldest sister, Mary Louise Keys was born December 24, 1924. My younger brother, Raymond Stewart Keys, was born April 16, 1927, in Brentsville, and my youngest brother, Douglas Gilbert Keys, was born May 25, 1929. My baby sister, Virginia Amelia Keys, was born April 4, 1932, in Brentsville also. Our home in Brentsville was a four room house with two rooms upstairs and two rooms down with a porch across the front on a one acre lot and a fence around it. There was no bath room, no electricity and no running water, but we did have a very good spring down in back of our barn and most of the homes down in our part of town got their water from that spring. It was named Fennigan Spring. Most of the houses were built like ours back in the early years.

My first remembrance, I was in our back yard riding our tricycle, we also had a little red wagon, this had to be about age three. I really remember when my uncle gave me a black doll baby for Christmas, but he gave my oldest sister, Louise, a white doll baby, and this really upset me. I never did get over this. Later in the year, about summer time, my father was operating a steam engine and pulling a flat steel drag. He was dragging

the county roads. He stopped at the end of Brentsville and Bristow Roads and came over to our house for a drink of water and to see how we were. Another time when I was about age four, our distant cousin, a Miss Nellie Keys, who kept house for our great Uncle Mifflin (Miff) Keys and lived across the dirt road from us came over and took my sister Louise, my brother Raymond and myself down the old road to Manassas, Va. The road started between our grandparents and Rucker Cooksey's properties and went down to Broad Run. On the way we passed Mr. Lute Black's home. Then at the run we turned right and went about two or three hundred yards to a swinging bridge, which we went across and back. That was a real experience

for us kids. The automobiles had to turn left just before the bridge and ford the run and on the other side was the start of Lucasville Road. Lucasville Road ended at route 234. The old road to Manassas started at John T. Keys and Rucker's properties that are now Bert Snouffer and Jim Shoemaker's, at Shoemaker's Garage in Brentsville.

Next I remember my mother took me to school my very first day in our old Model-T Ford car, and I was only five years old. We went up hill all the way, but had to turn right to enter the driveway, full of ruts and up hill to the schoolhouse. The car had only two forward gears and to change you had to stomp on the pedal in the middle of the floorboard and up the hill we went. And that was my first day of school. The schoolhouse had only five big windows across the front and a door to enter and exit. There was a small room in the rear that we used for our coats, overshoes, lunch bags, and a table for our water bucket and pencil sharpener. Also, we kept all the school equipment and sports equipment and everything else that the school needed was stored in it. There was a piano in front of the fifth grade desks, where two coal oil lamps sit for use at night, PTA meetings and etc. There was a



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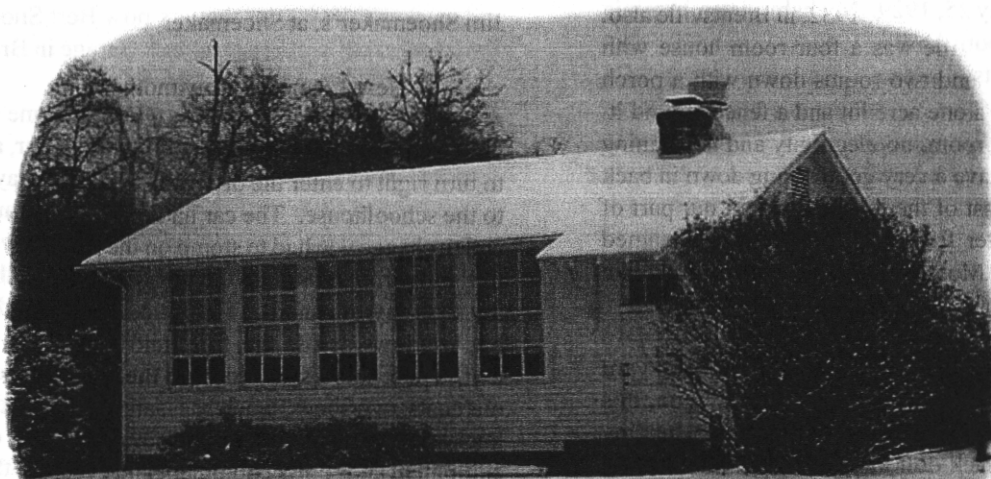
wood and coal stove in about the middle of the room and towards the rear, and when the weather got cool or colder, one of the boys, James (Cookie) Wolfe, who lived across the road from the schoolhouse, would come over and build a fire in the stove to heat the one room school and have it warm when we got there. One of the big boys would get the water for us from the well. He would put the water on the table and put a dipper in for everyone to drink out of. We got our water down near Bristow Road where an old big well was dug, probably when the Courthouse was built in 1820. Back when we went to school, there was a concrete slab ten or twelve feet square and about twelve inches or more thick, with a hole in the middle for an iron hand pump. This is where we got our water then.

We had recess in the morning and evening and when the recess was over, the teacher or one of the students would ring a hand held bell for us to come back in for more schooling. Our teacher was a Miss Dorothy Woodhouse and she boarded with two or three different families, but mostly with Mr. and Mrs. John C. Seymour that lived about one mile from our school and down Brentsville Road. The teacher walked to and from school every day except when the weather was bad. Then Mrs. Laura Seymour would bring the teacher in her car.

We played all kinds of games, skipping rope, marbles, ring around the roses, London Bridges falling down, here we go around the mulberry bush, Jack rocks, or jumping jacks, then baseball, and what a diamond we had! The home plate was on level ground in back of and between the schoolhouse and the old Courthouse. More

about the courthouse in a minute. Here we go around the ball diamond, from home plate to first base was down hill and in back of the base was the boys toilet and behind it was a board fence and the boards were standing upright and side by side to form a private fence from the toilet to a walk that went from the courthouse and the jailhouse. At this time the jail was owned by Mr. and Mrs. John Petty. The court in Manassas had ordered the fence be put up like this. Now back to our ball diamond, from first base to second was down hill, and up hill from second to third and behind third base was the girls toilet, and next to that was the woodshed. From third to home plate was level. From the pitching box was up hill and if the catcher missed the ball, sometime it would roll all the way to the ditch at Bristow Road. Now for the out field, between first and second the outfield went up hill, with a few cedar trees, honeysuckle, briers, and weeds. Then from second to center field was down hill but only grass and weeds. From center field to left field was a slight up grade, but more weeds, honeysuckle and briers. Now back to the boys toilet. Next to it was a henhouse, then a couple more buildings and then a cow and horse barn. And then a barbwire fence all the way around the ball diamond, by the woodshed and the schoolhouse and down to Bristow Road.

All of my brothers and sisters went to school there in the one room school house. My teacher through the third grade was Miss Woodhouse, then a Miss Mary Buckley taught me through the fourth and fifth grades. Man, what a time I had getting through those five grades.



Students attending the 77th School Reunion September 10, 2005



(L-R) Nelson Keys, Franklin Cornwell, Fredrick Whetzel, Casper Whetzel, Louise Bell, George Melvin, Catherine Corner, Edith Turner, Faye Samsky, Douglas Keys, Nancy Shely, Joyce Smith and Gladys Eanes. They are holding a quilt made by Edith Turner that reflects her memories of Brentsville including the Donovan Farm (where she grew up), the Brentsville Courthouse and School and doilies crocheted by her grandmother.

"Reflections"

A look back at the people, places and events of Brentsville.

HEAT LAMP CAUSES DESTRUCTION

On the night of the 3rd of Feb. at the home of Mr. & Mrs. W.R. Stephens, the shed where Bobby Stephens kept his livestock caught on fire and burnt to the ground. The cause was reported to be a red heat lamp with which he was keeping his pigs warm. A sow and eight pigs absolutely refused to leave and were burnt to death in the fire. The Mother would not desert her young ones. Two calves, two hogs and a goat were rescued in the nick of time by Mr. Stephens, Mr. Diaz, and Mr. Croushorn. The pigs were born about 1 PM Thurs. afternoon and the fire occurred between 9:30 and 10 the same day. Just before the fire engines (2) came there was an explosion caused by the infra-red heat lamp.

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