

Brentsville

A Look Back in History
by
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William Bevier

William D. Bevier's trial in Brentsville had a packed house, mostly with people wanting to see him receive the maximum sentence. Known as a quiet man, Bevier operated a tailor shop above Stryker's Whiskey Shop in the Town of Haymarket. He was involved in ongoing feuds with a couple of his neighbors but most of the bad feeling was confined to Garrett Hulfish and himself.

The Negro Patrols, for reasons not stated, would always go by Bevier's house and shop. On this particular Sunday, September 20, 1857, a large number of Negroes were meeting outside the building that was partially occupied by Bevier. James Mount and Garrett Hulfish, two members of the patrol appointed by the court, went to investigate and disperse them. They found one Negro without a pass who said Mr. Smith had his pass. They handcuffed him, intending to carry him to Grayson who was the nearest magistrate. When they arrived at Grayson's house, he was not at home so they released the prisoner.

Mount and Hulfish then decided they would return to Bevier's to see if the Negroes were still there. This time, however, William Bevier was outside and, seeing them approach, went into his shop and returned with a pistol. He told them he was going to protect his property and the Negroes. Hulfish would later testify in court that Bevier began to threaten them and "used many oaths and my name was mixed up with them." He also said "he would protect his property in spite of Hell and would have me yet before the Devil got him."

Later that Sunday evening, with his wife having gone to a church meeting, Bevier began to drink. He met up with Reuben Lee, a man who would not seem to be on the bright side in later testimony.

Reuben was talked into trading coats with Bevier because apparently Bevier's was easy to recognize. Bevier, according to Lee, had repeatedly during the day threatened to burn Haymarket. Along about dark, Lee went home, not wanting to be a party to what Bevier had been threatening. Later that night, Bevier started to make good on his threat. He didn't set fire to the entire town as was boasted; however, the entire town of Haymarket looked as if it were on fire. Hulfish's hay and wheat stacks were the only things destroyed that night.

When the case came to trial, Eppa Hunton was the prosecuting attorney. The jury was made up of the following: Gideon Warne, A. N. Doane, C. C. Claggett, Walter Keys, Robert G. Maddox, John W. Davis, John H. Austin, Matthew Davis, Edwin W. Latimer, John Read, William Goodwin and Francis Robertson. After a two day trial in which Reuben Lee, G. W. Smith, Garrett Hulfish, James Popkins, James Mount, Thomas Shirley and T. W. Turner had testified for the prosecution and there were no witnesses for the defense, the case concluded. Bevier was returned to the jail while the jury was deliberating. On Tuesday, October 13, 1857, the jury, having finished, had agreed to the guilt. Thomas K. Davis, the sheriff of Prince William County brought Bevier back into court. The jury foreman read the following statement - "We the jury find the prisoner William Bevier guilty of feloniously and maliciously burning stacks of hay and wheat belonging to Garret Hulfish of the value of \$125 and sentence him to three years in Penitentiary of this state. And it is ordered that the Sheriff of this County convey William D. Bevier from the Jail of this court to the Public Jail and Penitentiary house therein to be kept imprisoned, and treated in the manner directed by law."