



# Brentsville Journal

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## The Removal of the Courthouse from Brentsville to Manassas: Fraud or Sour Grapes

On July 1, 1872, the qualified electors of Prince William County voted upon the question of removing their County Seat from Brentsville to Manassas. The impetus for this removal was, in fact, much like that begun in the late 18th century, when citizens in the western portion of the county urged removal of the courthouse from Dumfries to Brentsville. While petitioners for the change of venue relied upon the mercy of the Virginia General Assembly, the 1872 removal was put to a vote of the citizens.

very similar reasons that a new group of supporters pressed for removal from Brentsville to Manassas by the 1870s.

The development of the railroad at Manassas Junction recommended the town as an excellent site for the public buildings. Many wealthy and influential businessmen had invested in property in the growing town. One man, George C. Round, went so far as to "donate" the land upon which the new county seat would be built. These factors, combined with damage that Brentsville incurred during the Civil War and its retarded repair and redevelopment, led to the raising of the issue.

So it was that, in 1872, the General Assembly issued a bill, "To authorize the qualified voters of the County of Prince William to vote on the question of removing the County courthouse to Manassas." (Prince William County Circuit Court Archives, Judgements, 1873). This bill stipulated:

*"1. ... that it shall be the duty of the several officers conducting elections in the*

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## Artifact Corner



This millstone was recently uncovered at Moor Green, the home built by Howson Hooe c. 1815. While there is no indication that milling took place in the location it was found, it is known that the Hooe family was involved in milling operations in the early 19th century. For more information on Moor Green, see page 4!

The county seat was removed to Brentsville in 1820, after more than 35 years of petitioning. The justifications for this change included the fact that Dumfries was at an extreme end of the county and thus difficult to reach. Dumfries was no longer a viable port and center of trade due to the extensive cultivation of tobacco that resulted in the silting in of Quantico Creek. Speculation may have also played a role, as many parties with an interest in the move had already invested in lands where the new county seat would be built. It was for

## Living in the House that Hooe Built Moor Green, circa 1815

*Glenn and Karen Callihan recently moved to Moor Green, the estate of Howson Hooe that is located across Broad Run from the Brentsville Courthouse. Their tremendous dedication to restoring this amazing property is commendable. We asked them to write something for the "Brentsville Journal" so that we could learn more about their efforts.*

Karen and I have been living at Moor Green since last March. We discovered the house completely by accident. Although I have always been a history-buff and Karen loves old houses, we planned to live in a contemporary home much closer to D.C. However, we followed the advice of an acquaintance and looked farther west. We saw the old house sitting atop the hill after looking at a nearby home. There was no "For Sale" sign and luckily for us it was winter or the trees would have totally obscured the house from the road. When the realtor asked us what we thought about the house that was on the market, we told her that it did not interest us, but jokingly added that if the old house on the hill was ever listed, that we would love to see it. Amazingly the realtor replied, "Funny you should say that..." and two months later we became the latest occupants in a line that stretches back almost 200 years.

We have loved every minute of life at Moor Green. We often talk about how we do not truly own the house, but are simply allowed the privilege of living there until we can pass it along to the next caretaker. Moor Green was once part of a considerably larger estate consisting of almost 500 acres. It is now barely eleven. Karen and I are working hard to properly maintain even that small amount but more on that in a moment.

Moor Green's history has been something of a mystery but with hard work by some dedicated researchers, the veil is slowly being lifted. We have had a genealogist working for months and she intends to publish a comprehensive article in

the future. We won't steal her thunder but suffice it to say that the house has been witness to many interesting people and events. Evidence shows that the house was built circa 1815 by Howson Hooe. It passed from Howson to his son, James, and then to his sister, Jane. It was a slave-holding property. Jane's son, Richard, was 19 in 1861 and still living in the house. He was one of the first to enlist in the Confederate Army at the Brentsville Courthouse.

It is said that Moor Green was used as a hospital on several occasions during the Civil War; probably by both sides. I believe that this is true (especially after the nearby Battle of Bristoe Station) but have yet to find any records to support this claim.

The original name of the house is another mystery that is yet to be solved. Our researcher has found over ten different spellings of the house while reviewing the records. Moor Green was originally one word or two, or whether it was "Moor, Moore, More, or Morr," we may never know. Certainly the definition of a Moor does not fit the beautiful surroundings of the house. Our researcher speculates that the original name may have been "More Green (supported by the spelling in Howson Hooe's will). If true, this may have been a "poke" at all of the logging that had taken place on the nearby Bristow Tract, implying that Howson's home was "more green" than the surrounding area.

We have undertaken numerous projects to improve the house and grounds and these activities



## Living in the House that Hooe Built - Moor Green, circa 1815 continued

keep the two of us fairly busy. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these projects are the things that we discover around the house. We have been told that numerous relic hunters searched the grounds in the 1970s (when the house sat empty), however we routinely uncover artifacts during our work. These include hundreds of shards of old dishware (most dating back to the early 1800s), an old millstone, brass doorknob (or handle), a bottle or two, and various other things that we always call Robin Meyering to help us identify. Also, Ron Turner graciously gave us a ledger book that he found at a trade show that listed all of the purchases that Redmond Foster (Jane's second husband) made at a local store in the 1880s. We are hoping to eventually locate other similar items to add to the known history of the house.

Previous owners have done a great job maintaining the house and incorporating modern conveniences without intruding too much on the character of the house. Still, there are challenges living in a home that was not designed for modern plumbing, electricity, heating and cooling, or closets. Also, considering that the house has over nine acres of yard (and two of woods), cutting the grass every week can be a challenge. All things considered, however, Moor Green has held up very well over the centuries and we have every confidence that it will be standing long after we are gone.

There are two cemeteries (and many ghost stories) associated with Moor Green. On the property, about 75 yards behind the house is the old family cemetery. There are numerous stones although none have markings. Ron Turner visited once and examined the site. He believes that there are as many as sixty burials there. Archeologists from the Smithsonian examined the area last year looking for a



*Ceramic sherd found at Moor Green*

mass, Civil War grave reputed to be on the property. They could not confirm the existence of a mass grave, however it is still probable that there are a number of individual soldier graves in the family cemetery.

There is also a slave cemetery a short distance in front of the house. It is now on airport property and is untended. We do not know the number of burials there but suspect that there are at least as many as in the family cemetery. Karen and I are considering asking the city for an easement to this cemetery so that we can look after its upkeep and re-associate it with the house.

There will be a new addition (baby) to Moor Green come November, so many of our projects may have to slow down while we learn how to keep up with a little one. Considering how closely I believe that Moor Green was originally associated with Brentsville, we very much intend to become active in the Historic Centre in the future. In the meantime, we'd love to hear from you and see what thoughts you have on the house or its history. Our email address is [majgmc@yahoo.com](mailto:majgmc@yahoo.com)

### Nominating Committee Forming

Members of the Friends are needed to serve on a nominating committee for the election of a Vice Chairman, Treasurer and three Directors. Interested members should contact Kay Breeden at [TheFriends@brentsville.org](mailto:TheFriends@brentsville.org) or call 703-791-5524. The nominating committee is tasked with identifying members who are willing to serve as an officer and then must publish a list of candidates in time for the August meeting.

