

It started on February 10, 1686 when James II, King of England, proclaimed "the Inhabitants which now are or hereafter shall be settled in the said Towne and Tract of Land" were free to exercise "their Religion without being prosecuted or molested upon any penall laws or other account for the same...provided they behaved themselves in all civill matters so as to become peaceable and loyall subjects"¹ He was referring to the 30,000 acres purchased from Lord Thomas Culpeper which was granted to George Brent, Nicholas Hayward, Robert Bristow, and Richard Foote under the name Brent Town Tract.

Their welcome was stated by the King in so many words, "Right trustee and well beloved Wee greet you well trustee and well beloved George Brent of Woodstock, in our county of Stafford in that our Colony of Virginia, Richard Foote and Robert Bristow of London, Merchants and Nicholas Hayward of London, Notary Publick"²

In the records of 1821 and 1822, when Brenstville became established, the description of the town was "50 acres of land, the property of the Commonwealth at the court house in the county of Prince William."³ Seventy lots were plotted; 3 of the acres for a public square, and 3 acres were set aside for taverns.

A copy of the Brent Town land grant can be found in Virginia Land Grants by Old Dominion Press on pages 70-74.

In 1835 Joseph Martin wrote in Gazetter,

The court house, clerk's office and jail are handsomely situated on the main street, in a public square of 3 acres. Besides them, the village contains 19 dwelling houses, 3 miscellaneous stores, 2 handsome taverns, built of brick and stuccoed, 1 house of entertainment, 1 house of public worship, free for all denominations, a bible society, a sunday school, a temperance and a tract society... There is in the vicinity a common school in which the rudiments of English education are taught...Population 130 persons, of whom 3 are attorneys and 3 regular physicians...

The wasteful tenure of the Bristoe (sic) estate...has in a manner cut it off from the benefits of a thriving neighborhood. This tract... has been ravaged of all its timber and for the most part 'ploughed down to be barren' by an unmerciful course of cultivation, under a numerous tenantry, for upwards of 70 years,... there is no doubt but the desert will soon be made to blossom under the labors of individual enterprise, and Brentsville will take a new start toward prosperity."⁴

wrong { Of the Brentsville Courthouse Bishop Meade said in 1857, "was fitted up...for worship, but that has long since been abandoned."⁵ The courthouse was used as a church when the nearby Broad Run church decayed.

On July 11, 1861 the description of Brentsville was such, 40 houses, 15 taverns and inns, brown stone Episcopal church, small brick courthouse and jail.

The scene in 1941 looked like this," A mere village today, Brentsville has a distinguished past. It is situated in the eastern corner of the 30,000 acre Brent Town Tract granted in 1687 to George Brent, Nicholas Hayward, Robert Bristow, and Richard Foote, to be used as a sanctuary for people of all faiths."⁶ The plan dissolved and the land was divided. Brentsville stands on the 7,500 acres that went to Bristow (1643-1707). From him it went to another Robert Bristow just before the Revolution. His land was confiscated after he died by the State in 1779. This confiscation was contested by a son, the tract being divided (100 acre lots) and auctioned off. Proceeds went to Literary Fund for educational purposes.

In August of 1962 Brentsville was described, "...the villiage is a thin collection of a dozen houses, though several of the old main street houses survive. The church still stands, as does the courthouse. But the latter building, its mission having been lured by the railroad to Manassas in 1892, stands vacant, and silent, a little known monument to the Community's past."⁷

see all churches, Ministers & Families of Va, v. 2, p. 209. Meade is referring to Dimples Court House,

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Nicholas Hayward, whom George Brent worked with, set up guidelines for Brenton. Through this land ran Brent Town road from Potomac Path up Long branch of Aquia and across the divide above the head spring of Dowill's Run to the lower side of Town Run. The propositions were set up in 1687 as follows,

...And of the town that they have begun to build, called Brenton, make the following propositions for the encouragement of persons who plan to emigrate into that country and there make a permanent establishment, that is to say 'to the first to present themselves they will sell, for the sum of ten pounds sterling cash, at four écus to the pound sterling, 100 acres of land near enough to the town to build a house upon it.' Under this offer the purchasers and their heirs, will become proprietors of the said land in perpetuity, subject only to a quit rent of four shillings sterling per annum.

Such persons may be assured that the said land is healthy, good, and fertile, producing all sorts of grains grown in Europe, such as wheat, rye, oats, etc.; vines and all sorts of fruit, and that the water is excellent.

At the price above mentioned, the proprietors will give the preference of choice of the situations of farm and house in the order of application, but only on condition that the purchasers shall emigrate to become residents. It is the expectation of the proprietors in the future to make another and a higher price for general sale of said lands.

For the further encouragement of such families as shall first present themselves, who can not or do not wish to pay cash, and who desire to be assisted by these proprietors, they offer to lease to such persons 100 acres of land for a farm and one acre in the said town for a house, and to furnish to each family nails and other hardware in sufficient quantity to build a house in size 26 to 28 feet long and 14 to 16 feet wide and 15 bushels of indian corn for their subsistence the first year, all at an annual rent of 4 écus (or 1 pound) sterling."⁸

These plans were not successful, as were not either George Brents'. The passage of this land went from George Brent to each of his 4 sons; his grandson George; William --1782 of Richland in Stafford county, great-great-grandson of the first Giles Brent; then to William's sons Richard --1814 and Daniel, who sold the land after the Revolution.

There was continuous argument over the boundries of Brent Town. Finally in 1737 & 1738 the land was surveyed. The greatest part fell

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between Broad and Cedar Runs and extended west from the mouth of the Walnut Branch of Cedar to the north fork of Dumfries Road where it crosses Broad Run. After this survey occupation of the land took place.

Along with the Haywards and the Brents, the Bristows and the Footes attained land in this area of Northern Virginia. Four tracts were drawn between the families. In 1741 the Brent and Bristow tracts were subdivided into units of 200 acre plantations. They were leased annually for 530 pounds of tobacco, the crop of the land. Robert Bristow, as his his ancestors, lost the land in 1779 being pronounced an alien enemy. The Commonwealth of Virginia became then responsible. This land as a part of the Bristow tract of Brent Town became the site of the new court house in 1822. Consequently the town of Brentsville became established.

After the Courthouse had been located in Dumfries since 1761 it moved Northwest due to people moving to the western section of Prince William County and the collapse of Dumfries. Brentsville became its new home in 1822 until 1892. The move became necessary when Dumfries, once a growing port town, began to decline in commerce. The new courthouse was located on the Brent portion of the Brent Town tract.

The Prince William County Courthouse at Brentsville was described as, "red brick structure in Flemish bond within a thin circle of trees. From its gabled roof, which turns a gable-end to the front, stands up a small octagonal domed cupola, centered over the entrance; and, at each corner, a meager chimney-top."⁹

The trustees of the Courthouse numbered: John Macrae, John Gibson, Gerald Alexander, William S. Alexander, Richard Davis Sr., John Mills, Charles Hunton, John Leachman, John Fox, William French, Benjamin Johnson, John Hooe, and James Foster. They were to manage the affairs of the town.

The County Clerks were:	Philip B. Dawe	1813-1832
	John Williams II	1832-1854
	Philip D. Lipscomb	1854-1865
	Mordacai B. Sinclair	1865-1869
	John C. Poor	1869-1870
	Little C. Osmann	1870-1870
	Lucian A. Davis	1871-1887
	Edwin Nelson	1887-1911

The Brentsville Courthouse was built by William Claytor. It was restored by community funds in 1930. These funds were supplemented by proceeds of a law suit concerning the building of a dam on a creek (against the builder). It seems a swimming hole, willed by Judge James Bankhead Thornton in 1918, was ruined by the dam. The county won \$4,500 which provided for the maintenance of the building.

In 1870 the Courthouse wanted to be moved to Manassas. The people voted in 1872 and reaccuring in 1883 (in agreement with the special Acts of the General Assembly) only to lose both times by approximately 50 votes each time. A large majority were in favor of the transfer from Brentsville to Manassas, but due to the fact of possible damage to leading citizens of Prince William County which resided at Brentsville, the Courthouse remained. "Brentsville was located in the central portion of the county in an area of large landowners of considerable political influence."¹⁰ A third election took place in August of 1892 and it was voted for removal. Brentsville, being the site of the fourth Courthouse in Prince William County, gave way to Manassas with the help of "Iron Horse," a railroad line built by Orange&Alexandria Railroad which made Manassas more accessible then Brentsville. Though lawyers and tavern keepers tried to keep Brentsville on the map as being the site of the Prince William County Courthouse, the railroad running through Manassas won the race. January 1, 1894 was the first court opening.

Dates & Events Concerning Brentsville

- 1686 - George Brent was the King's attorney
- 1686-1687, February 10 - religious liberty was granted by James II to George Brent, Nicholas Hayward, Robert Bristow, and Richard Foote
- 1687 - 30,000 acres (Brent Town Tract) were granted to the above men
- 1687 - propositions were set down by Nicholas Hayward for Brenton
- 1687 - Durand's book was published advertising the advantages of Brent Town
- 1688 - George Brent was House Representative from Stafford County
- 17th century - Prince William County Representative of the House of Burgesses was George Brent of Stafford
- 1737&1738 - Brent Town land was surveyed
- 1741 - Brent and Bristoe tracts were subdivided into 200 acre plantations
- 1776 - the residence of William Brent in Aquia Creek was burned by Lord Dunmore
- 1783 - Prince William County taxpayers of this year included the following Brents: Daniel C., Hugh, John, and William
- 1779 - ancestors of Robert Bristow lost their land being claimed 'alien enemy'
- 1822 - Brentsville became established as a town
- 1822-1892 - Brentsville was the site of the Prince William Courthouse
- 1850-1851 - at the Constitutional Convention Prince William County was set up in 8 districts; Brentsville being one of these
- 1867-1868 - at the Constitutional Convention townships became magisterial districts; Brentsville being one of these
- 1872&1888 - people voted for the removal of the Prince William County courthouse from Brentsville to Manassas, but failed both times
- 1892, August - people voted and were successful of removal of Brentsville Courthouse to Manassas
- 1894, January 1 - first court opening in Manassas after transfer
- 1930 - proceeds from the law suit against the builder of a dam were combined with community funds for restoration of the Brentsville Courthouse
- 1975, October 25 - the Brentsville Historic Recreation Area, to consist of the schoolhouse, jail, and courthouse, will open to the public under the Prince William County Parks and Recreation Center Director Richard E. Metz

Brent Family

Daniel Carroll Brent - in 1796 he subscribed, \$50 a share, to stock for opening and improving the navigation of Quantico Creek because the port was going to be closed down

Eliza Ashton Brent - second wife of Daniel C.

George Brent - nephew of Giles, Mary, Margaret, and Fulk; he gained religious tolerance for all denominations settling in Brenton; served as the King's attorney in 1686 and to the House in 1688. In Durand's book published in 1687, he tells of the advantages of Brent Town and describes George, "A gentleman of the neighborhood...came to meet us and said that he was one of three or four who had 20,000 acres of land for sale in this country... that they should offer the land in question to French refugees (the Catholic faith)"¹¹

Giles Brent - he moved from Maryland to Virginia when problems arose with Lord Baltimore. He moved toward the Northern Neck of Virginia with his brother Fulk and his sisters Mary and Margaret and they made their homes 'Peace' and 'Retirement' in Stafford County

Hugh Brent - county committee on safety he served due to revolutionary propaganda. William also served on this council in 1774

Margaret Brent - she was the first woman with large holdings and business interests in the United States. She governed a manorial estate and was the first woman to ask for the vote. She was called "the first modern woman in the new world."¹²

Mary Brent - she along with Giles, Fulk, and Margaret first came to Aquia in 1647 and then moved to Stafford County where they made their homes. She was one of the first English Catholic settlers in Virginia

Polly Brent - she is the daughter of Daniel C. ???

Richard Brent - U.S. Senator 1890-1914

Robert Brent - out of Cossington in 1487, he married Margaret Colchester, daughter of Lord of Stoke & Admington. He had land in Quantico where the General Assembly established a warehouse to take care of trade

William Brent - he was a member of the Virginia Convention in 1776, in the same year he was Captain of the Prince William Militia, in 1781 he was a civil officer who inspected tobacco at Dumfries, he acted as Commissioner to promote manufacturing society in Occoquan in 1810, he also breed horses

BRENTSVILLE JAIL

This small red brick box-like building was once a resident in 1941. This was part of the original town square where there was a tavern where soldiers of the Civil War were recruited. Also a gallows was erected here once. The tavern lot use to be an old burying ground and now heartsease, flowers, and thorny bushes have overgrown it.

Three graves that lie here are:
Catherine A. Purcell 1799-1869 -
John Purcell 1802-1867
Lucian F. Purcell 1835-1867

GIRLS' SCHOOL

After the war this building became a girls' school. It use to be a house of plaster covered brick, with a gable roof and the brick window openings were flat-arched. It was built in 1822, the same year of the courthouse, by Jane Williams widow of John Williams who was county clerk 1795-1813. Mrs. Williams was daughter of William Dawe.

