

Featured Brentsville Building The Prince William Courthouse at Brentsville Our 4th County Seat

With the decline of Dumfries in the early 1800s, there was a call for the center of government to be moved once again to a place of easier access for all residents of the county. Dumfries was the third courthouse site (in use from 1762 to 1782), the first being on the south side of Occoquan Creek about 150 yards east of what is today Route 1. The second was located in the present Marine Corps Reservation about one-half mile west of the Government concrete road leading from Route 646 to Sowego and was in use from 1742 to 1760 (Ratcliffe 1978:10-11). The fourth courthouse was authorized by the General Assembly to be located on a part of the Brent Town Tract granted to Robert Bristow and escheated to the State in 1779 (Ratcliffe 1978: 12). It was placed at this location because the country on either side of Broad Run, above the confluence with Cedar Run, had become the most populous part of the County (Harrison 1987: 317). Significantly, during the early decades of the nineteenth century the Brentsville vicinity "included landowners of the largest political influence" (Harrison 1987: 371). In 1820, the General Assembly directed that fifty acres of land be laid out for a town. Trustees were appointed to manage the town business, seventy plots were platted, and three acres reserved for a public square, on which the courthouse was to be located, and three more acres reserved for a tavern (Ratcliffe 1978: 73). This courthouse was in use until 1892 when County relocated the Courthouse to Manassas.

Historical Research and Archaeological Reconnaissance at the Brentsville Courthouse Complex, prince William County, Virginia,
Center for Historic Preservation, Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, Virginia
22401-5358

The setting of the building adds much to it's distinction, it sets back about fifty feet from the road, with the remains of a flag walk from the street to the door with it's huge stone doorstep, over which so many feet have trod. There are still many fine trees in the yard, one especially beautiful cedar that must have looked up the scene long before this building was erected. On the right is the jail, with a stone walk that leads from the side entrance of the Court House, and if not a bridge of sighs, it must have been a sorrowful walk for those who went forth prisoners. Back of the Court House is the spot where the gibbet once stood, and to the left, on the site now occupied by a one-room school, was the office. This has been gone for many years, but the town pump remains, the only one I believe in Prince William County.

The interior of the Court House, while in need of repairs, still retains much of its dignity and beauty of the past, the woodwork is fine, and the gallery and stairway leading to it is interesting. The judge's bench is at the extreme end of the room directly opposite the front entrance.

To give a resume of Brentsville Court history, would carry one through the period when many of Prince William's prominent men were shaping their careers and the walls must have resounded with the impassioned speeches of the group of brilliant young lawyers that gathered there. It suffered much from the ravages of war, which has left the county minus many of the valuable records that were destroyed or stolen at that time. After the court was removed to Manassas, the building was used, as a school.

Research made by Susan R. Morton, Haymarket, Virginia, May 10, 1937.

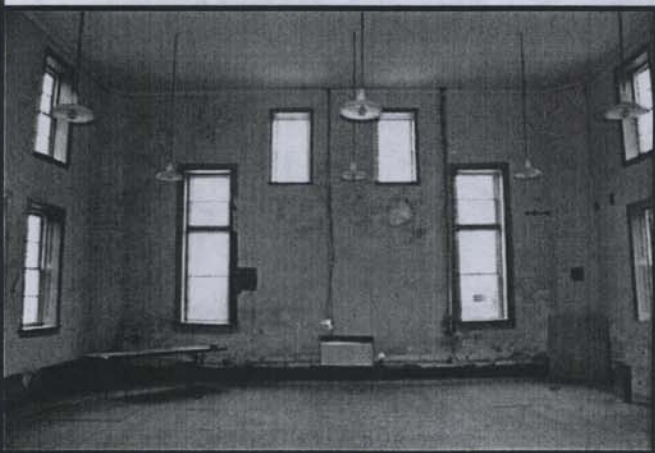
The Brentsville Courthouse Restoration 2004 - 2006



Outside view (old) 01-27-2004



Outside view (new) 08-11-2006



Inside view (old) 02-14-2004



Inside view (new) 09-28-2006

WHERE WILD THINGS LIVE

Read about the Paw Paw on page 6



Flower - 04-26-2006



Fruit - 09-28-2006



Photo courtesy of Nelson Keys
Date Unknown



Smith Family Gathering
at the Courthouse
Date Unknown
Photo courtesy of Fred Wolfe