

The Bell Ringer

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of the Friends of Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre, Inc.*

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June 2006

“...being desirable to the town... a new Protestant Episcopal Church is now being built...”

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After a pleasant stroll through the fields amidst a small, curious herd of cattle, the many rows of graves could be seen through the trees. Taking in the full extent of this burying ground made it possible for the visitors to mentally take a step back into the past and envision the sacred resting place as it might have been more than 200 years ago, surrounding the church. The footprint of this structure remains today, clearly marking where Dettingen Parish’s western house of worship, Broad Run Church, once stood.

Built in 1752, Broad Run Church must have been an impressive, substantial brick structure. The clearly defined, raised outline of the building rises from two to three feet high on all sides of the former 30’ X 60’ brick church. The bricks themselves form the raised areas, decreasing in density as scattered about both into the interior and throughout the exterior of the fallen walls. Many glazed bricks were evident amongst the rubble. And, all around, having stood sentry since as early as the 1750s, were row upon row of gravestones and burials. In fact, it appears that the burying ground was at least 300 feet x 240 feet. The church, the graves, even distinct traces of the former road leading to the church, served to enlighten and excite the visitors, far beyond the mental images they held based only on documentary research. But, that same research was what had led them to the site and down the path to the creation of this brief

history of the Episcopal Church in and around Brentsville.



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The ruins of Broad Run Church - gravestones in the foreground and the rectangular footprint of the former parish church in the background, notable by its distinct outline of green vegetation which surrounds the denser, brick footprint.

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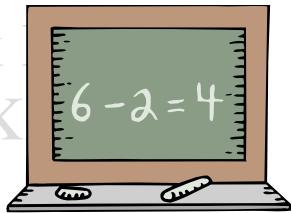
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Take Note!



Beginning with this June 2006 issue, the *Bell Ringer* has been changed to a quarterly newsletter. Since the *Bell Ringer* has evolved to include a great deal more research, it will be released four times per year. It will be mailed to members in good standing and also posted on the web site at www.brentsville.org. A short, monthly update, *the Brentsville Friends* will also be mailed to all members.

This month's *Bell Ringer* contains a history of the Episcopal Church in and around the Town of Brentsville. We encourage comments and sharing of additional research that may not have been included in the article.

Also included in this month's issue is an update on the Weedon family, key players in the Fewell Trial about which a series of articles and transcripts were published in the *Bell Ringer* from October through February. A reader has shared some genealogical data. Check this out on page 19.

Don't forget, The Friends' are hosting a Neighborhood Picnic with live music by blues and classic rock band, *The 11th Hour*, on Saturday, July 15 at 5 pm at the site. The event is free of charge and The Friends will provide lemonade and iced tea. Bring your own picnic and blankets or lawn chairs. This will be an excellent evening for the whole family! We hope to see you there!

The Education and Research Committee



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Stonework at the former St. James Episcopal Church in Brentsville.

Friends of Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre, Inc.

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**This issue of the *Bell Ringer* was written by
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“...being desirable to the town... a new Protestant Episcopal Church is now being built...” continued

In the 1620s, the Virginia Company increased colonial self-rule, attempting to induce greater immigration to Virginia and further develop local markets. The House of Burgesses was formed, with representatives from Virginia’s towns or “burgs,” hence the name. The Burgesses were faced with addressing the relationship between the church and the state. In fact, more than half of the laws enacted were church related. These laws included penalties for use of inappropriate language, non-attendance, and the salaries of clergy. In a recent book, John K. Nelson described colonial Virginia’s government as “parish-county.”¹

The parity Nelson described between the church and civil government was illustrated by the number and nature of the laws enacted, especially taxation. In some cases, the church tithe was more than double that of the county. The parish also provided for relief of the poor and orphans and had the important task of selecting ministers. A board of trustees, known as the vestry, selected ministers. Some historians view the vestry system as the birth of American republicanism. The vestry system’s success was obviously reliant on the strength of the individual men who acted as trustees.

Another variable in the structure of early Virginia churches was geography. The many rivers tended to divide the population into discrete units or parishes which could include quite a lot of territory. This led to the difficulty of parishioners traveling great distances to attend a parish church. Population growth enabled sufficient tax base for the creation of new parishes. By 1649, there were twenty churches in Virginia and the number increased with time.

Created out of Hamilton Parish in 1744, Dettingen Parish encompassed almost all of Prince William County. The name “Dettingen,” came from a Bavarian Village where the British

won a victory in the War of Austrian Succession. The first church in Dettingen Parish was built in 1667 at Quantico, prior to the creation of Hamilton Parish and when it was still known as Overwharton Parish. It was alternately referred to as Quantico and Dumfries and was still standing in 1744. An additional chapel of ease was built in the center of the county, near to where the town of Brentsville was later established. This small, wooden structure was later referred to as the “Old Chapple.” By the early 1750s, new churches were built at Quantico and along Broad Run. But times were a changin’, as Americans chafed at their British keepers and the Revolution altered both religious and secular life entirely.

The notion of “separation of church and state” dates back to the Enlightenment philosopher, Voltaire. Like John Locke’s idea of the “social contract” between the people and government, Montesquieu’s belief in the disassociation of church and state, was included by the founding fathers in the framing of the Constitution and Bill of Rights. While in principle this was the law of the land, the reality in the hills and valleys of the growing nation was quite different. The relationship between the church and state remained quite strong as demonstrated in Prince William County throughout the 19th century when the Town of Brentsville served as the county seat of government.

Before there even was a Town of Brentsville, on land just outside its present day location, there was one of the parish churches. Broad Run Church, built in 1752, was one of two that were within Dettingen Parish at that time. Prior to this structure, one Dettingen Parish church was located at Quantico, and, “it is possible that it [the parish] also took over another wooden church in the neck at the confluence of Broad and Cedar...., and in 1744 that neighborhood

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was already well populated with Chotankers who would have been more likely than any others then on the frontier to build a church.”²

Chotankers were the many families who inhabited the the modern Maryland counties of Charles and St. Mary’s and extending all the way to Alexandria and then south to Fredericksburg and who prospered as cultivators of tobacco.³

The Records of Dettingen Parish reference a chapel at Broad Run as early as 1745. In July of 1745, Moses Linton and Lewis Renno (Collector of the Parish Levy) were present at a meeting which recorded in an account, “To Tobacco to be left in Church Wardens hands for to agree with workmen to Build a Gallerie at Broad Run Chapel – 2500” Tobo.”⁴ Another record “Ordered that Major Thomas Harrison have the liberty of Building a Gallerie for the use of himself & Family in Broad Run Chapple not discommodeing any of the Pews in the Chapple.”⁵ In fact, a note in the preface of *The Records of Dettingen Parish* states that before a new church was built “...it may be that there was also at that time a wooden chapel in existence near the present day Brentsville which was known variously as Broad Run, Cedar Run and Slaty Run.”⁶

The chapel at Broad Run either became too small or fell into disrepair because in 1751 it was “Ordered that the Church Wardens advertise the building of two Churches in the Parish the walls to be of stone or brick to be Each in the clear not above Sixty foot long and thirty foot wide, for workmen to bring in Planes [plans] on Easter Next if Fair, and if not, the Next.”⁷ In that same year, tobacco was levied and sold to fund the building of the two churches.⁸

Broad Run Church, built near a portion of George Slater’s 1729 “Slater’s Run” land grant, was built between 1752 to 1754. The church was known by many names, including Broad

Run Chapel, Slaty Run Church, or the Church at Redmonds. “Redmond” referred to the Redmond/Redman family, long time residents of the area and whose property the church was possibly near. The cost of erecting this 30’ X 60’ brick church, built by William More and Gabriel Murphey, was 100,000 weight of tobacco. This was paid in installments of 20,000.⁹



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Close-up of the brick footprint of Broad Run Church, all that remains of the house of worship save for the extensive cemetery surrounding it.

Broad Run Church was a large and costly church for its time. It was most certainly a well attended church based on its documented size, the footprint still visible today, the accounts recording the collection of the church levy and the number of gravestones extant in its graveyard today. With the end of Britain’s influence in America came the concept of Montesquieu’s separation of church and state and fundamental changes to the parish system. It is believed that Virginia was an exception to the rapid growth of Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian churches in the wake of the Revolution. In fact, the Protestant Episcopal Church was established in 1785 as separate from the Anglican Church with the passage of the General Assembly’s “Statute for Religious Liberty.” Few if any other churches appear to have been established in Prince

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William County prior to 1800.¹⁰ Whether these changes had an impact or not, for unknown reasons, Broad Run Church was reported to have been in disrepair by the 1800s. Yet, out of the ashes, a phoenix was rising nearby. The Town of Brentsville would be established in 1820.¹¹ And with the new town came the people needed to populate a congregation.

The status of the Episcopal Church in Prince William County in the early 1800s is not well understood since the parish records did not survive for the period from 1791 to 1815. Records for the church are largely comprised of the *Journals* of the Convention of the Diocese of Virginia. The Conventions of the Diocese of Virginia were annual meetings scheduled each May to be attended by clergy and a lay representative from the churches of the Diocese of Virginia. While both clergy and a lay representative were welcome, many parishes lacked full representation at these meetings, perhaps due to financial limitations or the difficulties associated with travel in those days. Records of these meetings' proceedings were published as the *Journal* of the Convention of the Diocese of Virginia and consisted of information and events from May to May of a given year.

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The old roadbed, marking the path once used by visitors traveling to Broad Run Church

Dettingen Parish finally reappeared in the *Journal* of the Diocese of Virginia in 1815, after a 23 year hiatus. This entry merely stated that a parochial report was received from “the congregations of Dumfries and Aquia, Prince William County....”¹² A parochial report is the progress report made to the Convention by a clergyman. One wonders what events and circumstances prevented the parish’s participation in the intervening years. In any case, at the 1816 meeting, Dettingen was represented by the Reverend William Steel.¹³ His report stated “that a vestry has been organized, and that they hope to build a church this summer.”¹⁴ In this same year, Richard Channing Moore, Bishop of Virginia, reported in 1816 on churches wherein regular services had been restored since 1814, the advent of his posting as Bishop. Regarding Prince William County, Moore reported that one church was tended to by Mr. Thomas Allen and two by the Reverend Mr. William Steel.¹⁵ It is interesting to note that the removal of the Prince William County seat from Dumfries to a more central location in the county had been the subject of petitions for more than 35 years.¹⁶ But, this was not a done deal in 1816, as the Act of Assembly establishing a new place for holding courts was not passed until 1820. Thus, only speculation as to the actual location of the two churches presided over by Reverend Steel can be made. Could one of these have been Broad Run Church? If so, then where was the second? For that matter, if Broad Run Church was too decayed by 1816 to serve as a house of worship, where indeed were the two structures in which Steel preached?

The 1817 Convention included a report from Dettingen made by the Reverend Steel and a lay representative, Laurence G. Alexander.¹⁷ Alexander was a “gentleman justice,” who was commissioned as a magistrate on September 2, 1823 in Prince William County and served

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through at least 1837. He also served as Commissioner of Revenue for Prince William County in 1835.¹⁸ The report made by these men stated “...that a vestry has been elected for that parish. Communicants thirty-two—baptisms sixteen—catechumens twenty—deaths seven.”¹⁹ The report made for 1818 is similar. In attendance were lay representative Mr. Lewis Berkeley²⁰ and the Rev. Thomas G. Allen, Dumfries Church, Dettingen parish, Prince William....”²¹ Reverend Steel, apparently was not in attendance.²² The report for 1818 was from the Dumfries Church only and noted 30 communicants, 13 baptisms, and 8 deaths.²³

Reverend Allen, of Dumfries, and Reverend Steele were both in attendance at the 1819 convention.²⁴ In this year, the Reverend Richard Channing Moore, Bishop of Virginia, made report that in the autumn of 1818 he had traveled to parishes “in the northern section of the diocese.” During that trip “From Alexandria I passed into Prince William, *consecrated a new church*, preached to a pious people, and administered the Lord’s Supper.”²⁵ Once again, no location for this new church was identified. And, another two years would pass before the Town of Brentsville was even established, let alone constructed. It is possible that a church was built and consecrated nearby, as the land in the area was occupied and farmed by tenants on the Bristow tract, land owned at first by the Bristow family and then the Commonwealth of Virginia. The lots on the tract had been under lease for at least 80 years at this point. Where could this new church have been built? Were the three churches referenced in 1816 still in use? The *Journals* simply do not answer these questions.

In 1820, Dettingen Parish was represented at the convention by lay deputy, William Foote, Reverend Allen of Dumfries, and Reverend Steel, now tending to Dettingen and Leeds parishes.²⁶ They reported, “Dumfries Church,

Dettingen parish, Prince William County. Communicants thirty-three—baptisms thirty-one—marriages thirteen—deaths four. A collection was made in this church for the benefit of the Episcopal fund, which amounted to six dollars sixty-six and a quarter cents.”²⁷ And, “Dettingen and Leeds parish. Baptisms twenty-one—communicants thirty, four having removed. In this parish there has been an increase of communicants, and a greater attention to the ordinances of the gospel. Prayer-books increase, and some of the congregation have become more engaged for redemption through the blood of Christ.”²⁸ The possibility of an increase in occupants in the non-Dumfries part of the parish could be attributed to the establishment of the new county seat and the new Town of Brentsville.

The Town of Brentsville was established in 1820 as the new county seat for Prince William.²⁹ As the town grew, there may have been a need for a new church. It may be possible that a small Episcopal chapel was built in the town around 1822, but this has not been verified via documentary evidence, despite the theory’s repeated publication in various county history books and the WPA oral histories from Prince William County.³⁰ The earliest mention of this possibility comes from Bishop Meade which states “After a failure of all efforts for the resuscitation of the Church in Dumfries, our attention was directed to the other parts of the parish in Dettingen. The Reverend Mr. Steel, beginning in 1822, laboured for some years with partial success, and built a small church in the centre of the parish. The Reverend Mr. Slaughter followed him in 1835, and preached with more success at Brentsville – the new county seat – and Hay-market.”³¹

The *Journals* of the Convention for 1821 do not include any report for Prince William County. In 1822 Dettingen Parish was represented only by

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the Reverend Steel.³² Steel reported, “Leeds and Dettingen parishes, Prince William County.

Leeds is in a more flourishing condition than when last reported. In Dettingen, no material change has taken place within the last two years; there have been 25 marriages and 20 baptisms—communicants 29: within the above period there have been several removals and deaths.”³³

While Meade certainly confirms a congregation, the absolute location of a church structure is not documented by his reference to a small church in the center of the parish. Steel’s report describes a lack of “material” change. Could he have been referencing something as substantive as a church structure? Many questions about the various churches in use during this period remain unanswered. The historian’s awareness of subtle biases in interpretation must be considered here. Historians and readers of history each have their own unique historical memory of events and “believed history.” These beliefs may not necessarily agree with official accounts. And so, at least privately, a particular “version” of history may be contested. This can then manifest itself as a clear differentiation between official and believed history. Further, it often appears that only the believed history is that which is internalized. In the case of an early, wooden chapel’s existence in Brentsville, a supposition that has been “believed” and even published without citation for many years, statement of its lack of existence challenges common belief. Rather than combat the inevitable contention possibly derived from such a challenge, the author encourages other historians and readers to engage in their own research and share their findings.

Locations for houses of worship in Dettingen Parish for the 1823 report were not identified. The parish was only represented by the Reverend Steel at the convention, reporting, “Dettingen and Leeds parishes, Prince William, continue in much the same state as when last report. The

public buildings at Haymarket have been purchased for a church, parsonage, and schoolhouse. A new church has been erected in Dettingen parish. Communicants the same as before, except four removed and three admitted—baptisms eighteen—marriages thirteen.”³⁴ Is this then evidence of the construction of a church in Brentsville? It certainly does seem clear from Steel’s report that Haymarket is not the location of the new construction and the church at Dumfries can be excluded by its coverage in the report of the rector of Aquia Church, the Rev. Stephen Prestman.³⁵

The “church” at Haymarket was the region’s former District Courthouse. In 1800, Commissioners of the Superior District Courts, a system established in Virginia in 1788, chose Haymarket as a central location for the District Court of Fairfax, Loudoun, Fauquier and Prince William counties. The previous location was at Dumfries. A courthouse, jail and clerk’s office were built by James Wright on land that the town’s founder, William Skinker, had offered for the purpose.³⁶ Wright proved to be quite a character as seen through case files of the District Chancery Court Archives in Fredericksburg. The testimony of several of his apprentices indicated construction was delayed due to Wright’s excessive drinking.³⁷ One of these apprentices, William Claytor, would later build the Prince William County courthouse and ordinary on Tavern Square at Brentsville in the 1820s. Evidence for Claytor as builder of the Courthouse at Brentsville is based on the recessed, oval plaque in the gable of the structure that is inscribed with, “*Prince William County Courthouse Built by William Claytor – Architect – 1822.*” His bond for constructing the buildings on the public square at Brentsville is lost. However, the Clerk’s Fee Books indicate he was assessed a fee for a bond in 1824.³⁸

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In 1807, The Virginia General Assembly abolished the District Court system. By 1812, it was ordered that the public buildings be sold. Until 1814, the courthouse was used as a school and then it became a community center. Then, in 1830, William Skinker, Jr. purchased it and deeded it to the Episcopal Church. This was done with the provision that if the property were ever used by anyone other than the church, it would revert to the Skinker family. It became St. Paul’s Church, whose records are extant for after 1837 and consist largely of birth, death and marriage records.³⁹ It appears that the Church may well have begun its occupation of the former courthouse prior to the deed from Skinker.⁴⁰

A ten year gap in the *Journals* of the Convention of the Diocese of Virginia exists for Dettingen Parish spanning 1824 through 1834. Steel’s “...small church at the centre of the parish,” could have served the new Town’s population, but its exact location remains unknown. It seems likely that the new county court house, at least part of the time, served as a house of worship, as the Court Minute Book for 1835 recorded, “Ordered that the key of this Courthouse be placed in the custody of the keeper of the Jail, and that he do not permit the Courthouse be opened for any purposes whatsoever except for the session of the Court and whenever may be necessary to have the bell rung to announce the fact that preaching is about to take place...”⁴¹ Bishop Meade wrote that “The Reverend Mr. Slaughter followed him [Steel] in 1835, and preached with more success at Brentsville – the new county seat – and at Hay-market. The Reverend Mr. Skull succeeded Mr. Slaughter at the same places.”⁴² No church building is mentioned, merely the words “at Brentsville.” And while the new court house at Brentsville may have offered a temporary or part time solution, a more permanent resolution was to be sought.

The Reverend Philip Slaughter represented Dettingen Parish at the Virginia Diocesan Convention in 1835.⁴³ At this convention, Reverend William Meade, now the Assistant Bishop of Virginia, told of his visitation to Prince William County during the summer of 1834, “...I set out in a short visitation to Prince William County. I was much gratified in being able to set apart to the exclusive worship of Almighty God a most excellent building at Haymarket, which was originally a courthouse, and had been, without alteration, used for many years for religious meetings. It has recently been secured by the friends of the church, and very neatly and comfortably fitted up for public worship. In this place I was engaged, together with the Rev. Mr. Adie, in the performance of religious services during the 8th, 9th, and 10th of August. Our meetings were long and interesting, and calculated to encourage our hopes that good was done. The sacrament was administered, and thirteen persons confirmed. In the afternoon of the Sabbath, as on another occasion at a private house, I preached to the coloured persons, who appeared attentive and thankful. On the two following days we were engaged in similar services at Brentsville, where four persons were confirmed. These two places afford a fine field of labour to a minister of the gospel; the Rev. Mr. Slaughter is now employed in it.”⁴⁴ Notably absent is any description of a church building at Brentsville, in spite of a full description of the house of worship at Haymarket.

Dettingen Parish did not appear in the Virginia Diocesan *Journal* for 1836, but in September of this same year, Reverend Meade once again visited Prince William’s churches, reporting, “On Monday I went in company with Mr. Lemmon to Brentsville in Prince William County, where I preached twice and Mr. Lemmon once. Wednesday and Thursday were spent in Haymarket, where I preached twice, baptized

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three children and administered the communion.”⁴⁵

In 1837, Reverend Slaughter’s replacement, Reverend William Scull reported at the convention. At this time, he made a clear distinction between St. James’ and Haymarket Parishes, first usage of such terminology in the *Journals* of the Diocese of Virginia. Scull stated, “St. James’ and Haymarket Parishes—William Scull, Rector,—The Rector reports that he became the Minister of these Parishes in February. Public worship is well attended. In St. James Parish a Sunday School has been re-organized and at Haymarket, arrangements have been made for the operations of another.

Recently an effort has been made at Brentsville for the erection of a new house of worship; it will, in all probability, be successful. 1 member has been added to the Church, and 16 have been baptized—14 of them were colored. Collection, at Brentsville, \$17.36; at Haymarket, \$3.85; total, \$21.21.”⁴⁶ Could it be that the collection at Brentsville was markedly higher than at Haymarket because of the congregation’s desire to build a new church?

In 1838, Scull merely reported numerical statistics,⁴⁷ but in July 1837, Bishop Meade visited Dumfries and reported, “...I proceeded to Dumfries, where we met with the Rev. Mr. Scull who had officiated there the preceding day. I preached to a full house and confirmed two persons. The old court house in this place has been converted into a very comfortable place of worship and is the joint property of Episcopalians and Baptists. But few of the former remain in this once busy, now dilapidated and almost deserted village.”⁴⁸

It is of interest that yet another former court house was occupied as a house of worship. When the county seat of Prince William was moved to Dumfries in 1759, a large, brick courthouse of unique design was built. At that time, Dumfries was a hub of commercial activity

for the booming tobacco trade. Tobacco cultivation depleted the soil and caused erosion and the subsequent siltation of Quantico Creek, preventing its navigation by large, trade vessels. The Dumfries economy suffered and much of the trade shifted to Alexandria and Fredericksburg in a new commodity, wheat. “An Act changing the place of holding courts for the county of Prince William,” was passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 1820.⁴⁹ After a Commission met, the new seat of justice was positioned centrally within the county and the Town of Brentsville was laid out around the new court house.⁵⁰ Official use of the courthouse waned and it later became available for use by the church.

1839 ushered in a new era for Episcopalians at Brentsville with the arrival of Reverend John Towles. His 1839 convention report was very brief, merely including some numerical statistics and announcement of his taking charge of the parish.⁵¹ Generally, Towles’ reports are noted for short, statistical data, as occurred in 1840. He made no attempt to provide information about his church buildings.⁵² One important change that did occur in 1840 was the addition of notations for the county in which a church was located and the ministers of the parish. In 1840, the Dettingen Parish churches were listed as St. James’ and St. Paul’s.⁵³ Just where this particular St. James Church stood remains a mystery. But, a new church was to soon be constructed under the guidance of Towles on one of the lots in the Town of Brentsville.

By 1825, Lot 14 in the plan of the Town was purchased by John Leachman from the Brentsville Commissioners.⁵⁴ The Leachman family had long resided in the area around Brentsville as tenants on the 7500-acre Bristow Tract, out of which the town was created.⁵⁵ Leachman died by 1828 without improving the lot, as he continued to be assessed for the value of the land only at \$100. Leachman’s estate

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remained responsible for the tax on lot 14 through 1841. In 1839, it appears a small structure or some other appurtenance was added to the lot as the assessment included an additional \$50 for improvements with the assessed values at \$50/\$150 (meaning value of the improvements at \$50 and value of the improvements plus the land at \$150).

In 1841, Leachman’s estate was included in the Land Tax Book but strangely no fee was charged. In this same year, Reverend Towles’ parochial report for St. James’ and St. Paul’s’ churches were only statistical in nature.⁵⁶ It should also be noted that a roadside marker erected in 1980 states, “St. James Church of Dettingen Parish (now Hatcher’s Memorial Baptist) was built in 1847 on the site of the old chapel.” No citation for the source or documentary evidence for this assertion was found. Certainly, the Land Tax records do not confirm the existence of a structure on the site unless it was not erected until 1839. This, of course, does not corroborate the hypothesis that a small wooden chapel was built there in 1822.

Little additional detail can be gleaned from Towles’ 1842 report, which stated that St. James’ church, Prince William County, was in Dettingen Parish, while St. Paul’s Church, Prince William County, was in Leeds Parish. In addition, St. James Church had lost communicants due to transfer to the newly organized Cedar Run Parish, St. Stephen’s church, Fauquier County.⁵⁷ It was in 1842 that James H. Reid was first assessed for tax on Lot 14 that he acquired “of Leachman’s Commissioners, 1 lot, \$100/\$125.”⁵⁸ This is certainly an odd amount to be assessed unless the lot was subdivided or the improvement assessed in 1839 had declined in value at this point. A complete search of the deed records for Lot 14 might confirm this, but for the scope of this article, only a particular portion of the lot is of interest and the deed was not sought. Record of a land transaction from James H. Reid

to Towles appears in the Prince William County Court Minute Book for 1845.⁵⁹ Reid owned several lots in the town and in the 1830-1840s was appointed a commissioner for having repairs made to the court house and jail during this period.⁶⁰ Reid also served as the Clerk of the Circuit Superior Court of Law and Chancery for Prince William County.⁶¹

The entries in the Land Tax Books for the years 1843 – 1846 remain unchanged from that of 1842. During this time, Towles’ reports to the Diocese continued. No data from Towles is available for the year 1843, but Bishop Meade reported to the convention that he had visited Brentsville, 2-3 August 1843, preaching and confirming persons on both days.⁶² Reverend Towles, limited his parochial reports to simple statistics for his two churches in the year 1844.⁶³ In 1845, W.J. Weir of St. James’ attended the convention as the lay representative. Weir is best known for his association with Liberia Plantation in Manassas, built in 1825. Liberia served as General Beauregard’s headquarters during the Civil War. Reverend Towles’ parochial report for 1845 continued to be short, terse, and statistical.⁶⁴ It was not until 1846 that significant change is noted.

In May 1846, Reverend Towles reported for St. Paul’s Church that “The Church edifice and lot in Haymarket have received some attention from the congregation, and considerable improvements are in progress.”⁶⁵ For St. James’, he reported, “Since the last report, a new Church has been erected in the town of Brentsville, a most substantial stone-edifice, 44 by 32 feet—the interior is not yet completed.”⁶⁶ The 1847 report indicated that Weir again served as lay representation from St. James Church, to the convention.⁶⁷ It was also noted that on the previous July 16 [1846] Reverend John Johns, Assistant Bishop of Virginia, visited St. James’

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“...being desirable to the town... a new Protestant Episcopal Church is now being built...” continued

Church during which time he confirmed three persons. His report to the convention noted that “At Brentsville...a substantial stone edifice has been commenced, and is so far advanced, that only the interior finish is necessary to fit it for use. I trust the requisite funds for this purpose will soon be provided, and the building consecrated to the service of Almighty God.”⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that Towles’ 1847 report made no mention of progress on the newly erected church building.⁶⁹

So it was that the construction of St. James Episcopal Church was begun in 1846-1847 on Brentsville Lot 14, located just across the street from the courthouse. The deed for sale of the land upon which this new house of worship was constructed can be found in the Prince William County Deed Books and is transcribed below.⁷⁰ Note the language used in this legal document describing the sale of land for the new church as “*being desirable to the town.*” This may be construed as demonstrating the continued relationship between the church and civil authority.

This Indenture made and entered into this 18th day of September in the year of our Lord 1847 between James H. Reid and Anna his wife and John T. Leachman of the first part, and William J. Weir, Allen Howison and Lucien Dade Trustees of the congregation of St. James Church Brentsville in the County of Prince William of the other part, whereas the said James H. Reid purchased under a decree of the County Court of Prince William County a lot of ground in the town of Brentsville in the County of Prince William containing half an acre the boundaries of which will be hereafter described, for the purpose of erecting a Protestant Church whereon and whereas said lot of ground was the property of the said John T. Leachman when an infant, and was sold pursuant to the provisions of the statute directing the sale of infants’ real estate, and being desirable to the town a conveyance for

said lot from said Reid and the said Leachman who has since arrived at full age, Now then this indenture witnesseth that for and in consideration of the premises, and for and in consideration of the sum of one dollar in hand paid by the parties of the second part to the parties of the first part, the receipt whereof hereby acknowledged, they the said Reid & wife and Leachman, have bargained, sold, aliened and conveyed, and by these presents so bargain, sell, alien and convey to the said William J. Weir, Allen Howison and Lucien Dade Trustees for the said congregation and their successors convey a certain lot of ground situate & being in the town of Brentsville in the County of Prince William on which a new Protestant Episcopal Church is now being built containing half an acre known in the plan of said town as lot number fourteen, lying at the southwest corner of Hooe and Bristoe Streets, To have and to hold said lot of ground and its appurtenances unto the said William J. Weir, Allen Howison and Lucien Dade Trustees as aforesaid & their successors in trust for the use and benefit of the congregation of the Protestant Episcopal Church aforesaid, the parties of the first part hereby conveying only such title as they have written here with warranty general or special. In witness whereof the parties have hereunto set their hands & seals the date above written.

J.H. Reid

Anna S. Reid

John T. Leachman

Prince William County

We Robert Williams and Seymour Lynn justices of the peace in the county aforesaid in the State of Virginia do hereby certify that James H. Reid and John T. Leachman parties of a certain deed bearing date on the 18th day of September and hereunto annexed personally appeared before us in our county aforesaid and acknowledged the same to be their act and deed and desired us to certify the said acknowledgment to the Clerk of

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**“...being desirable to the town... a new Protestant
Episcopal Church is now being built...” continued**

*the County Court of Prince William County in
order that the said deed may be recorded. Given
under our hands and seals the 22nd of September,
1847.*

R. Williams

S. Lynn

Bishop Meade later reported on Towles’ role in tending to his parish in stating, “The Rev. Mr. Towles has now for many years been faithfully and acceptably serving the parish. A new and excellent stone church has been built at Brentsville; and the old court-house at Haymarket has been purchased and converted into a handsome and convenient temple of religion.”⁷¹

William J. Weir’s involvement with St. James’ is confirmed not only by his attendance at the conventions of the Diocese of Virginia, but in 1848, the Land Tax Book records which note, “Weir, William J. & Trustees, \$100/\$125, ‘deed from Reid’.” In 1849, Weir was assessed for the lot at \$125 only. Finally, in 1850, the record reads, “Weir, William J., 1 lot, \$950/\$1000, ‘\$950 added for building (church)’.”

Before the new church could be consecrated by the Diocese, construction was required to be complete and payment in full for the project had to be transacted. In May 1850, it was reported at the Diocesan Convention by Reverend John Johns, Assistant Bishop of Virginia, that this had been accomplished by July 15, 1849, when the report noted, “July 15th - I consecrated St. James’ Church, Brentsville, preached and confirmed four persons. The sentence of consecration was read by the Rector the Rev. Mr. Towles; morning prayer by the Rev. Mr. Lockwood. The church is substantially built of dressed stone. The interior arrangements are convenient, and in the rear of the building a commodious vestry-room is provided. The whole structure is highly creditable to the minister to whose persevering efforts, the congregation are indebted for their appropriate house of worship.”⁷²



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St. James Episcopal Church (today, Hatcher’s Memorial Baptist Church) built in 1847.

At this point it is worth a digression to explore Reverend John Towles. A man named Henry Towles appears to have come from Liverpool and settled on the eastern shore in the 1670s. Henry Towles married Ann Stokely and members of their family resided throughout Accomac, Lancaster, and Middlesex counties. Henry’s son, James Towles of Corotoman, Lancaster (d. 1820) was the Clerk of Lancaster County from 1779 – 1820. James Towles married Felicia Chowning who gave birth to their son, John, on February 21, 1813. John Towles married Sophrania Chowning of Lancaster County in August of 1835.⁷³ Towles attended Seminary and was ordained as a priest by 1839.⁷⁴ He became rector of St. James in April of 1839.

It has been reported that Towles’ home near Brentsville was known as “Vaucluse.”⁷⁵ No record of a property bearing this name has been found. However, Towles did purchase several lots from Charles and Hannah Hunton in 1846, including 7.5 acres of former Bristow Lot #37 along the Brentsville-Haymarket Road and 25 acres east of Milford that was part of former Bristow Lot #5.⁷⁶ He acquired additional land in 1847, part of Robert C. and Elizabeth Leachman’s farm on Broad Run.⁷⁷ Towles

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“...being desirable to the town... a new Protestant Episcopal Church is now being built...” continued

apparently flourished financially as he further purchased two tracts of land for the grand sum of \$7300 in 1850, the “Slaty Run Tract” of 940 acres and the “Fitzhugh Tract” of 548 acres.⁷⁸ In 1855, his deed for 15 acres of property known as “The Crossroads,” was recorded.⁷⁹

An unidentifiable source, provided by researchers at the Virginia Theological Seminary, stated, “When the War Between the States began, his sons volunteered for service in the Confederate army. In 1862 ‘Vaucluse’ was taken as headquarters for a northern general, which forced Mr. Towles to refugee with his family to his native county of Lancaster. There he found that the old church of St. Mary’s White Chapel, where he had been baptised [sic], confirmed and married, was in need of a rector. He gave that church his service during the time he was a refugee, and greatly helped the people by establishing salt works, extracting salt from the Rappahannock River tidewater. One by one his sons, Robert, Vivian, and James were killed in battle. A Federal gunboat landed on the Rappahannock and destroyed his salt works which had proved such a blessing to so many people.

Hearing that the enemy had left ‘Vaucluse,’ and feeling homesick for his old parish, his beloved parishioners, and his home, he came back to Prince William in 1863, and again took up his ministerial work. He found his town churches dismantled and indeed largely wrecked by the war. They had been used as hospitals and barracks. He preached in school houses and in private homes until 1867. In 1865 there was nothing left of St. James Church, at Brentsville, except the walls and roof. The building had been stripped of windows, doors and floor, and was used for a stable. The building was partially restored through Mr. Towles’ efforts. He was assisted in the work by the people of Brentsville, and especially by Mr. Allen Howison, whose family was among the few Episcopal families left in the community. Windows, doors and floor

were partially restored, and the building was occasionally used by Mr. Towles and other ministers of the Piedmont Convocation...”

Regardless, by August of 1866, Towles had set up a school house, known as “The Sulphur Spring Academy, which was to serve as both a church and school. Soon after, it was burned by an arsonist after his first service there for the freedmen and three days before the building was to be used for the first time as a Sunday School for the freedmen.⁸⁰ Towles stated that prior to the fire he had been warned by local residents “not to preach to the freedmen in the building and not to open a Sunday school for them.” It is most likely this incident influenced Towles removal to Maryland by the following May of 1867, when he accepted rectorship of St. John’s Parish, Prince George’s County and Charles County, Maryland.⁸¹ He continued to serve in Maryland until his death. The will of John Towles is registered in Prince George’s County and dated July 6, 1885. Towles left his estate to his wife, Sophronia, naming her executrix.⁸²

By the time Towles served as rector of St. James, the Episcopal congregation was not the only game in town. A May 1, 1848 entry in the Court Order Book, (1846 – 1850) stated, “On application of the regular Baptist in connection with the Columbia Association, permission is given for preaching or other religious worship to be held in the Court House of this county on one night each month, or more than once if in continuation of the same meeting, provided the person or persons using the same, be careful and do no damage, which must be attended by the keeper of the key.” Certainly other religious congregations were active in the community.

Time and the ravages of the Civil War were not kind to Brentsville. The public lot on which the court house, jail and clerk’s office stood suffered severe damage during the conflict. The clerk’s

“...being desirable to the town... a new Protestant Episcopal Church is now being built...” continued

office was entirely dismantled, while the courthouse was not found to be secure enough to hold court. A document found in the Loose Papers of the Circuit Court Archives, dated Sept. 4, 1865 read, “A. Nicol and William E. Goodwin who were appointed a committee to ascertain by this term of the Court whether the Episcopal Church in the village of Brentsville in the county aforesaid could be procured for the purpose of holding court therein and if so to proceed to place the said church in proper condition for that purpose by this term, having made their reports. It is now hereby ordered that court from this day be held in the Episcopal Church aforesaid until I further ordered, and that notice hereby be posted at the Courthouse door and at the door of the Episcopal Church.”⁸³

By October 3, 1865, a “Report of Committee in relation to Courthouse” was filed,
“To the Justices of the County Court of Prince William County

The undersigned Commissioners appointed at the September term of the Court examined the Court House and report the expense of repairing the ~~Court~~ same House report that after making the proper examination they report it was the opinion that two thousand dollars will put it in good condition as it was before the War, and that persons could be found that would undertake to contract to do it for that sum.

We further report that in our opinion that an expenditure of seventy-five dollars would make the church now used as a Court House habitable during the months.

2 Oct. 1865 Mr. A. Bryant
 Silas Butler”⁸⁴

The Prince William County Court Minute Book for May 10, 1866 further stated, “Ordered that William E. Goodwin be appointed Commissioner to have the following repairs put upon the church now occupied as a courthouse to wit a platform to be erected in the east end of the

court room and four windows in said room to be closed with cotton or plank and that a partition be made to divide the court room from the small building in the rear thereof and that the doors and windows of said small buildings to be closed in like manner to those of the court room.” These repairs included the addition of windows and dividers so that the building could function as a court.

On November 6, 1866 the Court Minute Book read, “Ordered that the Sheriff of this county or his deputy do report application for the Courthouse for Public Worship to any ordained Minister of the Gospel in regular communion with his church when not occupied by the Court until this order is revoked.” Later, an *Alexandria Gazette* article dated October 30, 1871 stated Mr. Reid [Joseph B. Reid, government official and hotel proprietor] was supervising the “repair of the interior of the Episcopal Church at Brentsville which was completely destroyed during the war.”⁸⁵

Once the courthouse was repaired, the church was no longer needed for holding courts. It is unclear who occupied St. James’ during this period. The Chancery Court records for Prince William County are incomplete for this period and no case relating to the church’s disposition was located, although deed records from 1897 indicate the property was involved in a chancery suit.

Meanwhile, the removal of the county seat to Manassas saw many Brentsville residents move away. The first court session held at the newly completed court house was on January 6, 1894.⁸⁶ It was on this same day that the Board ordered that W.W. Kincheloe and J.L. Colvin be appointed to take charge of the Brentsville court house and jail, permitting them to either sell or rent the property with the Board’s approval. They were allowed to advertise this in the Manassas

**“...being desirable to the town... a new Protestant
Episcopal Church is now being built...” continued**

Gazette, stating “We the undersigned appointed by the Board of Supervisors at their July meeting 1896 to make sale of the Old Court, Jail and three acres of land at Brentsville beg to make the following report. We advertised the said property by hand bills and in the Manassas Journal to be sold on the 5th day of Sept. 1896. At which time no bid or bids were made for said property. We again advertised the said property to be sold 30 days after date, at which time no bid was made. We again adjourned the sale of the said property to be sold on the 27th day of Feb. 1897. At which time I. N. H. or the sum of \$517.00 upon the following terms ¼ cash, the balance in one, two & three years. The title to said property to be retained until the whole of purchase price has been paid and we recommend the conformation of said sale. Respectfully Submitted, E. Nelson, W. W. Kincheloe.”⁸⁷

In spite of these pivotal changes, ties between St. James’ Church and the courthouse in Brentsville continued. The “Church Lot,” was purchased for \$200 on September 27, 1897. JBT Thornton, CAS Hopkins and R.W. Merchant, Commissioners in a Chancery suit, sold to I.N.H. Beahm, the “...property known as St. James Episcopal Church of Brentsville...” A related Deed in Trust from Beahm to E.E. Meredith and JBT Thornton to secure Hopkins was noted, but a notation in the column dated May 11, 1898 indicates full payment was made and the deed was released. Hopkins was the treasurer of the Rectory Fund in Manassas, where the congregation had largely moved after the change of the county seat’s location.⁸⁸ Another deed was recorded on April 16, 1898 from the Board of Supervisors to I.N.H. Beahm for the 3-acre courthouse lot with all of its buildings. An accompanying Deed in trust to George Bucher of Lancaster, Pennsylvania to secure I. Jason Walton is also recorded.⁸⁹ By September 1, 1902, yet another deed bundling these lots was recorded from I.N.H. Beahm and Mary Bucher Beahm of Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, to the

Prince William Academy. The sale of “...the public square or Court House lot... and the Episcopal Church lot...” was transacted for \$1600.⁹⁰

Apparently, the Prince William Academy encountered legal issues. Chancery records from 1906 document a suit “Hooker, et. al. vs. Prince William Academy.” In this case, the Court decreed that it was to be ascertained whether the corporation failed, if the corporation’s officers and directors abandoned, whether it was insolvent, to establish what property was owned and as to whether their remained debts and interested parties. Queries were to be published in the newspapers in an effort to gather information related to the case.⁹¹

Following additional newspaper advertisements, Special Commissioners JBT Thornton and H. Thornton Davies were appointed to make sale of the property on October 3, 1906.⁹² The Chancery Order Book indicates that the appointed Commissioners did indeed make sale of the courthouse lot and Episcopal Church lots for \$175 to R.E. Wine, J.G. Colvin, W.E. Hale and H.W. Herring on December 15, 1906.⁹³ This is further verified by a deed, dated January 15, 1907 from Special Commissioner Thornton for the “Old Court House Lot of 3 acres” and the “...Episcopal Church lot – Lot no. 14.”⁹⁴ In April of 1907, “Hooker et. al. vs. Prince William Academy” in Chancery was “...dropped from the docket on motion of the counsel for the plaintiffs.”⁹⁵ The final deed included in this article was dated November 3, 1908, for sale of the “Episcopal Church Lot,” known as Lot # 14 from W.F. Hall and Fannie his wife, H.W. and Sarah Herring, R.E. and Lillian Wine, J.C. and Elizabeth Colvin, J.A. and Mary Hooker to S.P. Fogle, R.E. Wine and J.W. Leedy. Fogle acquired 3/5th ownership in this transaction, while Wine and Leedy each held 1/5th. They paid \$200 for “all that certain lot or parcel of land, lying and

“...being desirable to the town... a new Protestant Episcopal Church is now being built...” continued

being situate in the Village of Brentsville, in the county and state aforesaid, together with the improvements thereon...” and the “Episcopal Church Lot,” the same lot conveyed to the parties of the first part in Deed Book 56, page 187 by Special Commissioners, with the stipulation “...that the property herein conveyed shall be used by the congregation of the Brethren Church (or better known as the Progressive Thinkers) of Prince William County, Virginia...”⁹⁶

Special thanks are extended to Julia E. Randle, Archivist at the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia for providing data from the *Journals of the Convention of the Diocese of Virginia* (1815-1850) and biographical information on Reverend John Towles. Ron Turner provided much appreciated support in the content of this article. George Jones’ incredible cooperation and hospitality made it possible to view the ruins of Broad Run Church, a very rewarding trek for those involved. Additional, heartfelt thanks are offered to James and Laura Wyatt for editing.

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“...being desirable to the town... a new Protestant Episcopal Church is now being built...” continued

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2006

Fewell Trial Update

The Friends of Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre, Inc. recently received a letter from one of our readers that said,

Thank you for the time and effort devoted to the articles in the Bell Ringer about the Fewell Trial. James F. Clark was my great-great uncle, and the story makes for fascinating reading. His sister, Virginia Clark, was my great-grandmother. Your article mentioned the various Weedons in the drama and wondered about the connection between them. Perhaps this information will clarify that. The information comes from a document entitled WEEDON GENEALOGY, compiled in April 1960 by Eleanor Stritz Kebler. The preface says that the work is on file at the Library of Congress.

~ George Weedon, son of Augustine Weedon and Jane Wroe, was born 13 Nov 1787. He married (1) Winifred Roe, 21 May 1811. She d 14 Oct 1814. George Weedon died 23 Dec 1872.

~ George Weedon & Winnifred Roe had a son, Ferdinand Alphonso Weedon, born 5 Oct 1814. He married Huldah Cockrell.

~ Ferdinand Weedon and Huldah Cockrell had a daughter, Georgianna Weedon. The document says that she was "married, no children."

~ George Weedon, son of Augustine & Jane Wroe Weedon, married (2) Julia Trone, 23 Nov 1826. She was born 23 Nov 1806, died 29 Mar 1882.

~ George & Julia Trone Weedon had a son, George Milton Weedon, b 20 Jan 1840. He married (1) Virginia Clark, 17 Feb 1864, and (2) Amy Tolson, 22 Dec 1885.

~ So Georgianna was the child of George Milton Weedon's half brother. John Catesby Weedon, the son of Augustine & Jane Wroe Weedon and brother of George, above, was b 11 Jan 1797, m 14 Apr 1821, Elizabeth A. Trone, and d 30 Apr 1887.

~ John & Elizabeth Weedon had a son, Peter Trone Weedon, b 31 Dec 1835, m 3 Mar 1864, Louisa Mae French, and d 31 May 1890.

~ So G. M. Weedon and Peter Weedon were first cousins. George Milton Weedon was a JP in Stafford County, and was the first Superintendent of Schools, appointed by the governor.

~ The father of James F. Clark was Elder John Clark who was a Primitive Baptist minister. He was pastor of Chappawamsic Baptist Church at the time of these proceedings, and was later pastor at White Oak Baptist Church. I have an article that says he helped to build a bridge across the Rappahannock River at Falmouth.

Thank you again for the time and effort required to research and compile the articles.

Jane Sthreshley

Stafford, VA

The writers of the *Bell Ringer* are thrilled to have this contribution and thank Jane for sharing! She added a later note later that Charles L. Hynson married Georgianna Weedon on January 5, 1868 at Manassas. This bit of information was found in the Weedon Family Bible available on-line at Library of Virginia. Many other such documents have been published electronically. Check out these resources at: <http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whatwehave/>.

In addition to the Weedon family data, some new tales in the life of Lucien Fewell have come to light. Although on-going research is currently under way, it is already known that Fewell was imprisoned in New Mexico for a murder he committed in that state!

~**UPDATES**~

Friends of Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre, Inc.

Calendar 2006

General Membership Meetings

- ~ Thursday, Sept. 28 at 7:30pm
- ~ Saturday, November 4 at 10am –
Annual Meeting

Board Meetings

- ~ Thursday, August 17 at 7:30
- ~ Thursday, September 14 at 7:30

For more information on meetings, events and volunteering visit our web site at www.brentsville.org

Upcoming Events

- ~ Saturday, July 15 at 5pm –
Neighborhood Picnic and Live Music
(see page 2 for more details!)
- ~ Saturday, September 9 - **One Room School Reunion**
- ~ Saturday, October 14 – **Court Day & FBCHC, Inc. 10th Anniversary Celebration**
- ~ Saturday, December 9 at 12pm – 3pm
Holiday Open House



This headstone, from one of the burials at Broad Run Church, was rescued from vandals by a local property owner. The location of historic sites is often better left a mystery as they are threatened by the curious who do not fully understand all aspects of preservation as well as by those who may not respect the past.

The goal of the Education and Research Committee of the Friends of Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre, Inc. is the preservation and accurate sharing of the history of the Town of Brentsville. The Committee is comprised of volunteers who work together to create this newsletter, *The Bell Ringer*, and provide interpretation to visitors to the site. Anyone who is a member of the Friends of Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre, Inc., is invited to join us in our efforts.

