



# Historic Perspectives

Preservation of Prince William County's Historic Resources

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## PRINCE WILLIAM

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## Wintery Tales from our Historic Sites

### Holidays at the Old County Seat

The holiday season in Brentsville in the mid-twentieth century was always a busy and festive one. As a rural community, a lot of the town celebrated together with family and friends where you would find “no invitations given, no reservations required”. From the local newspapers, local residents were able to see who came to visit for the holiday season. From one edition of the Manassas Messenger on December 13, 1946, we know that:

*Miss Fay Golladay was home from Washington for the week-end-end.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Raymond McIntosh visited Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Keys on Sunday.*

*Chester Whetzel spent Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Whetzel;*

*Llyod Keys was back in Brentsville for the weekend-end; and*

*Mrs. Jim Shoemaker spent Tuesday in Washington struggling with Christmas Shopping. She says that taking the children to see Santa will be a separate expedition.*

Trees were cut down from the local fields, brought into homes and decorated with decorations, whether they were hand-made pictures glued in canning lids and hung on the tree or silvered glass balls or hand-blown reindeer. Families gathered the dinner tables feasting on Christmas hams, Jell-O salad, or cherry cheese pie, assembled around the trees giving out gifts of toys,



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Illuminated path to Brentsville's Union Church during the holidays



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Civil War Santa visits Brentsville's Union Church

oranges, candies, and more, or crowded around the pianos signing Christmas songs or hymns.

Prince William Historic Preservation tries to carry on the tradition of a rural town holiday here at Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre by inviting the local community to come out to Brentsville for a night of sweets, treats, and Christmas Carols. For many years, the Brentsville District High School sang in the Union Church or the

Courthouse, inviting the public to come and sing along while enjoying some hot chocolate and cookies. Many hand-made ornaments were made and taken home and sometimes we got lucky and Santa even came for a visit in the Union Church! We were not able to celebrate the holidays as we normally do this year, but we hope everyone had a safe and happy holiday

Paige Gibbons Backus  
Site Manager, Brentsville Courthouse  
Historic Centre & Lucasville School



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*Local students a-caroling at Brentsville Courthouse*

### Decking the Halls at Rippon Lodge

Every year, Rippon Lodge Historic Site staff work on improving and presenting new holiday decorations for the house. Twelfth Night is a constant topic we interpret each year, as most of the Anglo traditions had their origins from it. The faux food display is an important part of the presentation and catches the eye of most visitors. Some of the food looks very real, and I have had a few guests ask about where we store the food each day, so it does not spoil. Or they are concerned how we keep the bugs and mice away. The Hedgehog is a puzzle for some, for it is not a usual staple for American dining tables. Called a deceit, the Hedgehog was only one of the examples of an item that normally would not be eaten, being made of edible food material for future consumption. Hedgehogs were popular in England in the 18th Century, showing up in artwork, as well as on the dining table. Made by a former HPD employee, the hedgehog is front and center on the table. Some of the quills, which would be fragile almonds if it were a real deceit, are an irresistible enticement to touch. But



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*The Victorian Christmas room with deceits displayed at Rippon Lodge*

this, alas, is not allowed, because they break off easily.

Finding more modern toys to display in some of the rooms is challenging. Old toys can be found, but some are highly collectable, especially if they are in pristine condition. Toys are consumable objects played with until they break, and so they often have noticeable wear and tear, parts end up missing, and are sometimes forgotten or lost. They may be left in attics and storage bins, or thrown away with the trash, ending up in the landfill. Additionally, some modern toys were made from materials with a shorter shelf life. For the 1950's Christmas from a few years ago, we were fortunate to find a few board



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*A global children's holiday at Rippon Lodge*

games boxes, dolls, books, and some of the popular space toys of the era to include. Finding a 1950s television proved to be more difficult. Older tube televisions are available, but not usually for loan. Purchasing one was not an option since most are priced between \$250 - \$2,000. Therefore, staff had to purchase a visually realistic, cardboard prop television to use instead. Although not real, it certainly made a few visitors remember their first televisions growing up. It provided priceless joy at the bargain price of \$35!

Jessica Maria Alicea  
Site Manager,  
Rippon Lodge Historic Site,  
King's Highway Heritage Park



# Collections Corner

## George Washington Bicentennial Commission Bust

The Prince William County Historic Preservation Division has many colonial-era artifacts in our collection. At the Division's main office at Williams Ordinary is a bust of George Washington. However, the story behind the Bicentennial bust shines more light on the cultural views of Depression-era America than the actual life of Washington.

The first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was importantly transformative for the United States. Industrialization, increased urbanization, and mass immigration fundamentally changed American society. After trying to remain neutral for 3 years, by 1917 the United States entered the world stage as a major political power when it joined in "The War to End All Wars." After World War One unprecedented economic growth during the 'Roarin' Twenties' finally came to a crashing end with the Great Depression.

By the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington's birth, the United States faced an uncertain future.

President Calvin Coolidge established the Bicentenary Commission on December 2, 1924, five years before the Great Depression began. Flush with cash the commission had lofty goals to achieve by the Bicentenary date. The Commission teamed up with the American



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Rippon Lodge Black family's Bicentenary Washington Bust (2002.050)

Historical Association to edit and publish the 25-volume edition of *Writings of Washington*, which later ballooned to 39 volumes. The United States Postal Service released a 1-cent stamp for both public use and for stamp collectors. The image the Postal Service selected was the same bust that the Commission reproduced, Jean-Antoine Houdon's bust.

Invited to America in 1785 by Benjamin Franklin, the French sculptor Houdon traveled to Mt. Vernon to create a sculpture of the American general. Enduring a plaster life mask, Houdon's work was the basis for many of

the more famous renditions of Washington. Long considered to be the most accurate depiction of Washington, the Commission settled on Houdon's work to copy for the limited-edition busts. The Commission initially wanted to present a copy of the bust to each Governor, Senator, and Representative. However, the worsening economic conditions of the Great Depression ensured that this did not happen. Our copy of the bust was collected by the Black family of Rippon Lodge at some unknown date and currently is displayed at William's Ordinary looking out over Route 1.

Bill Backus  
Preservationist, Curator – Historic Preservation Division



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## A Medal of Honor at Bristoe Station: Michael Emmet Urell and the 82nd New York

On October 14, 1863, Confederate troops attacked the Union 2nd Corps near Bristoe Station in Virginia. The culmination of General Robert E. Lee's October 1863 campaign to outflank the Army of the Potomac, the Battle of Bristoe Station resulted in 2000 casualties on both sides. Four Medals of Honor were awarded to Union soldiers for their actions that day, including two from the 82<sup>nd</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry. One of those two was a young Irish immigrant, Michael Emmet Urell.

Born in 1842 in County Tipperary, Ireland, Michael and his family immigrated to the United States in 1853, part of the wave of Irish who left their homeland following the Great Famine. Like many Irish immigrants the Urells settled in New York City. With the outbreak of the Civil War Michael was among the first to volunteer, enlisting on April 18, 1861, in Company E of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment New York State Militia Infantry (re-designated as the 82<sup>nd</sup> New York in December 1861.)

Arriving in Washington in May 1861, Urell and the 2<sup>nd</sup> New York experienced their baptism of fire on July 21 at the First Battle of Bull Run/Manassas. Over the next two years the regiment participated in all the major battles of the Army of the Potomac. Urell apparently survived his first two years of combat uninjured, but at



Joyce

*Carte de visite of Michael Emmet Urell circa 1864*

Bristoe Station Michael would not be so lucky.

That October afternoon the 82<sup>nd</sup> led the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps as it marched along the Orange & Alexandria Railroad. Near Broad Run, it was attacked by Kirkland's Brigade of A.P. Hill's Corps. Urell, detailed as a Color Bearer, was wounded. After the Confederates were repulsed, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps continued the retreat toward Centreville. The 82<sup>nd</sup> suffered 26 casualties at Bristoe Station,

including 7 killed, 1 mortally wounded and 18 wounded.

Fortunately, Urell recovered from his wounds and by April 1864 had returned to the 82<sup>nd</sup> as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. He was discharged May 23, 1864 with most of the 82<sup>nd</sup> at the end of their 3-year enlistments. Ending his military service as a Brevet Major, Urell went to work as a War Department clerk and married Isabelle Helen Walton. In June 1870 Urell's bravery at Bristoe Station was recognized with the Medal of Honor. His citation reads:

"The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Private Michael Emmet Urell, United States Army, for gallantry in action on 14 October 1863, while serving with Company E, 82d New York Infantry, in action at Bristoe Station, Virginia. While detailed as Color Bearer; Private Urell was severely wounded."

But Urell's story does not end there. Nearly 30 years he would be called on to serve his adopted country again.

When war with Spain was declared in April 1898 Urell was commissioned a Major in the District of Columbia National Guard, accompanying the District's 1<sup>st</sup> Volunteer Infantry Regiment to Cuba. Arriving in July 1898, Urell





Joyce

Urell following his return from Cuba in 1898 wearing Medal of Honor and a New York State Gettysburg commemorative medal

and the 1st Infantry participated in the last stages of the Santiago Campaign. After his return from Cuba he became colonel of the 2<sup>nd</sup> District of Columbia Volunteer Infantry and retired in 1909 as a Brigadier General.

In 1910 Urell traveled to Ireland. In poor health, he died in Cork on September 6, but before leaving for Ireland, Urell left instructions that he wanted to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery next to Isabelle, who had died in 1892. His final wish was honored and today he rests at Arlington, not far from where his life of service began in 1861.

Contributed by Jeff Joyce  
Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park Volunteer



Joyce

Urell's grave at Arlington National Cemetery

## Winter Programs and Events

Register for these online at: [www.pwcparks.org/historicprograms](http://www.pwcparks.org/historicprograms)

First Day Hike At Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park	Jan 1
Prince William County During The Gilded Age	Jan 16
Prince William Historic Preservation Lecture Series: Ben Lomond, Buffalo, And The Assassination Of A President	Jan 28
Lucasville School Open House	Feb 6-7
African American History At Brentsville Courthouse	Feb 13
Historic Barnes House Tours	Feb 13
Winter Encampment With The Second Virginia	Feb 13
Everyday Full Of Work: The African-American Experience At Ben Lomond	Feb 13
Lucasville School Open House	Feb 13-14
Historic Barnes House Tours	Feb 20
Lucasville School Open House	Feb 20-21
Prince William Historic Preservation Lecture Series: The Story Of Jennie Dean	Feb 25
Lucasville School Open House	Feb 27-28
Feisty, Friendly, And Fearless: Women Of The Lodge	Mar 6
Women's History At Brentsville Courthouse	Mar 6
Virtual Heraldry Workshop From Brentsville Courthouse	Mar 13
Gourds To Tools: Crafting Crops Into Dishes	Mar 20
Scrambled Egg Hunts At Brentsville Courthouse	Mar 20 & Mar 21
Prince William Historic Preservation Lecture Series: An End To Innocence, The First Manassas Campaign	Mar 25
Rippon Lodge Easter Egg Trail	Mar 27
Spring Break History Camp	Mar 30-Apr 1
Science & History Of Gardening At The Haislip-Hall House	Apr 10
The Ellis' Magnificent Garden	Apr 17
Civil War Tours Of Brentsville Courthouse	Apr 17
Prince William Historic Preservation Lecture Series: James Longstreet After The Civil War	Apr 22
Calligraphy Class In The Brentsville Schoolhouse	Apr 24
Pre Revolutionary War Rippon	Apr 24



# Image Spotlight

## The Bristoe Battlefield Diorama

The sheer size of Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park—140 acres—can make it difficult for visitors to comprehend the October 14, 1863, battle that occurred there. Thanks to a new diorama exhibit at the park, visitors can now take in the Battle of Bristoe Station in a glance.

Bob Lehman, an Ohio native who creates dioramas as a hobby, constructed the snapshot of the battle, which is 82.5 square feet. The diorama also includes detailed topography and road networks of the battlefield and approximately 2,200 hand-painted figures. Mr. Lehman estimates he put in about 550-600 hours of work on the project. After consulting with park staff, Mr. Lehman created the surface of the diorama from foamboard. He then had to meld it and paint it to represent the battlefield as it appeared in 1863. Accurate period maps made this amount of detail possible.

Lehman's diorama depicts the climax of the Battle of Bristoe Station. Confederate troops can be seen charging across the Orange & Alexandria Railroad into their Union adversaries, which occurred moments before the Federals drove the enemy back to where they began their attack.

This new interpretive exhibit lays the complexities of the Battle of Bristoe Station in front of visitors and allows them to see how the battle unfolded before they make their way onto the field itself. Now, visitors can better understand what the Civil War truly looked like at Bristoe Station.

Kevin Pawlak  
Site Manager, Ben Lomond Historic Site  
& Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park



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*Bob Lehman constructing his Bristoe diorama*



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## PWC District Supervisor Visits Brentsville Jail

Late this Fall, Jeanine Lawson, the Brentsville District County Supervisor, stopped by to visit the Brentsville Jail to see all of the recent work. Staff has been working to ready the exhibits for a spring grand opening as part of a 10-year effort to convert the 1822 structure into a modern museum space. Supervisor Lawson has been an enthusiastic supporter of the project for much of that time.

## Honoring Master Mason Mike Vonder Born

Ask any of the staff of Prince William Historic Preservation Division, and they will tell you it is a profound honor to be stewards of our county's rich history, historical resources and structures. We also agree that it is a privilege to work daily in and around examples of the exemplary workmanship and tireless efforts of the professional and volunteer preservationists who are responsible for bringing our beloved historic buildings back to life. One such dedicated specialist, Michael Vonder Born, passed away two years ago, but his many contributions will not be forgotten. Earlier this year the staff planted a memorial tree between the two buildings that he helped restore for the people of Prince William to enjoy



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for years to come. The inscription reads:

Michael Vonder Born  
1957 – 2018

Master Mason of 2006  
Courthouse Restoration and  
2013 Jail Restoration

## Staff News

On December 14<sup>th</sup>, we welcomed new staff member **Dan Goldstein** to the Historic Preservation team! In the Historic Preservation Specialist (Interpreter) role, he will be working out of Williams Ordinary in Dumfries assisting with site coverage and programs with a focus on coordinating our Group Tours, Tourism activities and School Group efforts. Dan has an extensive background in museums by working at the Virginia Association of Museums, Smithsonian Institution, Gettysburg Foundation and the Fredericksburg Area Museum among others. His experience makes him a great fit into expanding our tourism impact and attracting group tours and student groups.

Rippon Lodge Historic Site manager **Jessica Alicea** has been nominated for Vice President for the Association of Living History, Farm and Agriculture Museums (ALHFAM). The elections should occur in a month or two.



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## A note & officer updates from Prince William Historic Preservation Foundation

Although the board's main purpose is to help funding the various initiatives put forth by the county's Historic Preservation Division, we have determined that it is equally important to raise awareness of the incredibly rich American heritage that is represented by the various properties owned by Prince William County. We are a county steeped in history from our Indigenous Peoples to the early explorers, first settlements, wars of Independence and Civil and into the 20th C civil rights struggles. These properties are symbols of our endurance and as such, should be preserved. More than this, these places are filled with fascinating stories that need to be heard both by the residents of Prince William County but visitors from all over the world. All this takes money. So how do we get there? By getting the word out, getting people involved and inspiring excitement in our "hometown history".

This year, Cornelia Miller Rutherford is taking over the reins as President of the Board. A voracious student of history

and resident of PWC for 33 yrs, this Ohio transplant is also the founder and CEO of the Virginia Renaissance Faire and the Phoenix Event Alliance. Mike Johnson has moved into the VP slot. Mike has been on the board for 6 years and is also a member of the



PWHPF

Prince William Historical Commission. His years of work with the Boy Scouts of America, Woodbridge Elks, Masons and his church make him a valued contributor to the Foundation. Continuing on as Treasurer is local attorney, Sharon Pandak, who came on board in 2004 and was instrumental in the founding of the PWHPF,

has long championed the Rippon Lodge projects. Sharon used her considerable legal talents in handling litigation for the county in a judgment of over \$3.8 million which went to the historic preservation program and toward the purchase of Rippon Lodge. Dr. Earnie Porta (PhD History, Georgetown) serves as secretary along with his duties as Mayor of Occoquan. A long-time member of the board, Dr. Porta has enthusiastically worked toward increasing public awareness of the county's historical sites for over 10 years. He plans to continue this campaign, boosting visits and to these remarkable places.

## Register Online Today for Winter Programs & Events

[pwcparks.org/historicprograms](http://pwcparks.org/historicprograms)