

BRENTSVILLE



“The houses generally are in ruin ...”



Brentsville was the Prince William County seat during the Civil War. In response to John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859, the Prince William Cavalry (Co. A, Virginia Cavalry) was formed here on the courthouse lawn in January 1860. The ladies of Brentsville made a flag and presented it to the company. Other Confederate units from Prince William County, such as the Ewell Guards (Co. A, 49th Virginia Infantry), were organized and drilled here.

Like many Virginia towns, Brentsville suffered heavily at the hands of both armies. Confederate Gen. Eppa Hunton, a Brentsville



Prince William Cavalry (Co. A, 4th Va. Cav.) flag – Courtesy Manassas Museum

resident and lawyer, had his house and other buildings destroyed. The Hampton Legion, among other units, was posted here on scouting missions, and several homes and churches served as hospitals. The county clerk's office was torn down and its bricks used for camp chimneys. Part of the ca. 1822 courthouse roof was torn off, and many county records were either destroyed or taken by soldiers as souvenirs. Capt. Andrew McHenry of the 13th Pennsylvania Infantry wrote of Brentsville in 1864, “The houses generally are in ruin.”

The Battle of Bristoe Station, fought three miles west on October 14, 1863, brought combat



Nineteenth-century map of Brentsville and vicinity, with nearby Bristoe Station and Manassas Junction, the focus of several campaigns and battles – Courtesy Library of Congress

to Brentsville's doorstep. During the battle, Federal Gen. John Buford's cavalry was posted here to protect the Federal supply train. Confederate partisan units operated in Brentsville until the end of the war.

Brentsville was founded in 1820 to be the Prince William County seat. The town never fully recovered from the war, and the economic center of the county shifted to Manassas because of the railroad junction there. In 1893, the county seat moved to Manassas. The ca. 1822 Brentsville courthouse and jail still stand.



Gen. Eppa Hunton
– Courtesy Library of Congress



Gen. John Buford
– Courtesy Library of Congress