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## *Primary Resource Comprehension: Brentsville Clerk's Papers*

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**Reporting Category:** U.S. History  
1865-Present

**Topic:** Political Growth; Civil War & Postwar Eras; Virginia 1900 to Present

**Primary SOLs:** USII.1, USII.2; USII.3;

**Materials:** Interactive Video; Primary Source Document; Comprehension Worksheet; Enrichment Activity (see attached).

### **Directions:**

- Students will watch an educational video illustrating the following concepts:
  - o A brief history of why the Brentsville Courthouse is significant to Prince William County.
  - o How historians use those documents to learn about the past and the importance learning to read and write.
  - o Video will tie into the worksheet that students will have to complete as part of their lesson.
- Complete Worksheet

### **Context:**

#### **The Importance of Brentsville Courthouse**

Brentsville is an important place in the history of Prince William County. From 1822 to 1893 it served as the county seat of Prince William where all matters of county business took place. It is also where all the County records were kept during this time. There are three public buildings that made up the core of the county seat: the courthouse, the jail, and the Clerk's office.

Many different actions of business took place in the county Courthouse. It is where people voted, paid taxes, disputed both criminal (breaking the law) or civil cases (cases involving

money or property), validated deeds and wills, and more. Those who were awaiting trial for criminal cases would be kept in the Brentsville Jail until it was time for their case to be heard.

Everything that transpired in the Brentsville Courthouse was documented by the County Clerk and many of those records were kept in the Clerk's Office. These documents ranged from deeds, wills, and receipts to minute books and court transcriptions. Since they are official documents of Prince William County, every time the county seat moves, these documents go with them. They are still preserved by the Clerk of the Court today in Manassas.

## **The Importance of Primary Resources**

These documents serve as valuable **Primary Resources** to Prince William County's history. A primary resource is a first-hand document written or drawn by someone who was there. That means these deeds, wills, court transcripts, records, and more were written nearly 200 years ago by the Clerk of the Court or who people that were there. They give us valuable information and tell historians a lot about people in Prince William County. They tell us who lived in the county and where, how families are related, who owned certain property, what kind of jobs people had and how they lived. These documents can also tell us about how roads and buildings were built, what kinds of arguments people had, what people believed in and what they cared about.

Historians use primary resources all the time to learn about history and how it affected the world we live in today. To practice your reading and comprehension skills, read comprehend one of the court cases that was recorded by Prince William County.

**Exercise:** (See attached)



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Be a History Detective and go to the Source!

Watch the accompanying video telling the story of Brentsville Courthouse and the importance of primary resources. Then read the primary resources and answer the questions on the following pages.

The order made by the County of Prince William at December court 1832 directing the Sheriff of said County to sell to the highest bidder at the court house on the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of January 1833, Ned, a man confined in jail as a runaway was complied with.

Ned sold for	\$70.00
Sheriff's commission off	<u>3.50</u>
	\$66.50

B. Brawner purchaser.

The above balance settled in jailors account that was certified at February Court last and sent to Auditor.

Basil Brawner, Deputy for Jesse Ewell, Sheriff  
March 7<sup>th</sup> 1833

I Judith Henry make this my last will and testament. I desire my funeral expenses and all my just debts to be paid by my Executor hereinafter named as soon as it may be convenient for him after my death and for that purpose I hereby bind my entire estate both real and personal.

I give and **bequeath** to my son John Henry my sorrel mare. I give and bequeath to my son Hugh F. Henry my colt, the colt of the mare given above to my son John. I give and bequeath to my daughter Ellen P. M. Henry, the land on which I reside together with all the stock, implements and household and kitchen furniture. And lastly I appoint my son Hugh F. Henry **executor** of this my last will and testament, revoking all former wills made by me and desire the court not to require security of him as my executor.

In testimony of which I hereto set my hand and seal this 27<sup>th</sup> day of December 1860. Signed, Sealed, Published & Declared as her last will and testament by the testate--- in our presence and in the presence of each other.

At a Court held for Prince William County on the 6 day of January 1862. This last will and testament of Judith Henry deceased was presented to the Court and being proved by John B. Grayson and John D. Dogan the subscribing witnesses thereto is ordered to be recorded.

P. D. Lipscomb, Clerk

15 August 1871

Commonwealth vs Charles Barbour

The Commonwealth of Virginia and the Jurors aforesaid upon their oath aforesaid do farther present that Charles Barbour on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of August one thousand eight hundred and seventy one, in the county aforesaid in and upon one John Thomas **feloniously** willfully and of his malice aforethought did make an assault and that the said Charles Barbour with a certain piece of timber to wit. A piece of fence rail in his hands then and there held, the said John Thomas in and upon the head of him the said John Thomas, then and there feloniously willfully and of his **malice** aforethought did strike and hit; giving to the said John Thomas then and there with the piece of timber aforesaid to wit the piece of fence rail aforesaid, in and upon the aforesaid head of him the said John Thomas\_\_ mortal wound to wit two **mortal** wounds of which said mortal wound he the said John Thomas from about 3 o'clock in the evening on the said 15<sup>th</sup> day of August in the year aforesaid to about ½ past 3 o'clock in the evening of the said 15<sup>th</sup> day of August in the year aforesaid, in the County aforesaid did **languish** and languishing did live; on which said 15<sup>th</sup> day of August in the year 1871, the said John Thomas in the county aforesaid of the said mortal wound died; and so the jurors aforesaid upon their oaths aforesaid do say that the said Charles Barbour, him the said John Thomas in the manner and form aforesaid, feloniously willfully and of his malice aforethought did kill and murder against the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth of Virginia. - Witnesses - Wilmer McLean and William Mathew.

James F. Clark

Attorney for the Commonwealth

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24 July 1881

Grand Jury Presentment - Moses Woodson

Prince William County to wit: The jurors of the Commonwealth of Virginia in and for the body of the county of Prince William and now attending the said court, upon their oaths present that Moses Woodson on the 24th day of July in the year 1881 in the county aforesaid, unlawfully interrupt & disturb an assembly of people then and there met for the public worship of God in a certain house known as the Colored Church & situated upon the public road leading from Gainesville to Buckland by rude and indecent behavior and by the use of profane language and by behaving in a **boisterous** manner against the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth of Virginia . Upon the evidence of Thos. Ball, M. Johnson, Lucius Foley & John Perry.

E. E. Meredith

Attorney for the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth of Virginia, To the Sheriff of Prince William County:  
Greetings: You are hereby commanded to summon Moses Woodson to appear before the judge of our County Court of the county of Prince William on the first Monday in September to answer an **indictment** presented against him by the grand jury at the August term 1881 for a certain misdemeanor and this he they shall in nowise omit under the penalty of \$100 and have then there this writ. This 5th day of August 1881, and in the 106th year of the commonwealth.

L. A. Davis, clerk



**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Primary Resource Analysis

*Answer the following questions using the primary resources and video.*

1. Where did these primary resource come from? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What different kind of resources are there? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What year do each of these reports take place? What were some of the events that were going on during these reports? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What do these sources tell us about the people of Prince William County?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What changes took place in the United States between the first and last report? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Why is it important to learn about these different primary resources?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

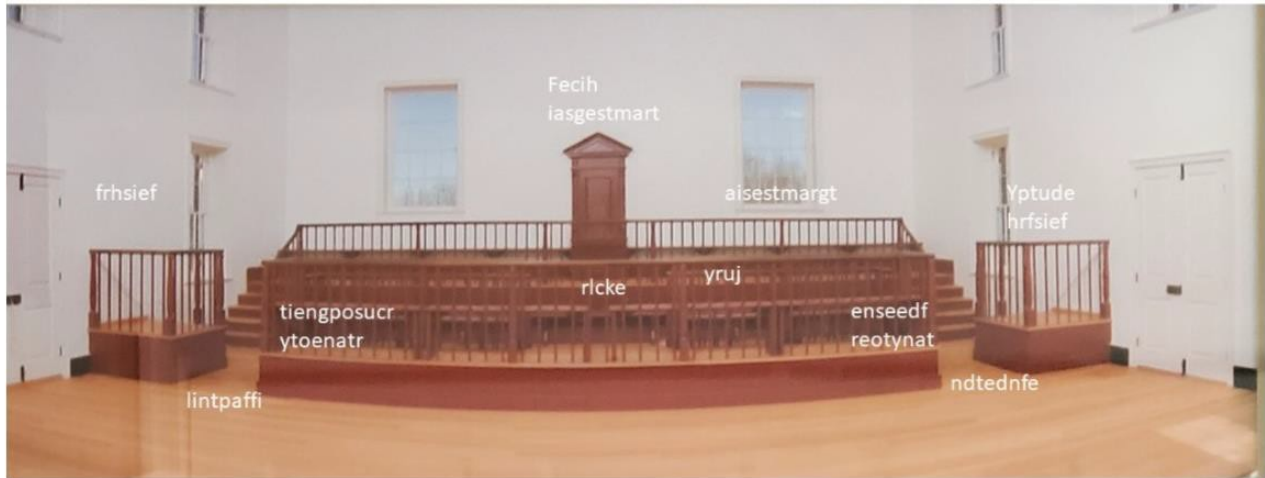


## Enrichment Activity

The person bringing a law suit is called the **plaintiff** and he/she hires a **prosecuting attorney** who argues for the plaintiff in the courtroom. The person accused is called the **defendant** and he/she is represented by a **defense attorney** who argues for the defendant in the courtroom. The **chief magistrate** is the senior judge who is in charge of the courtroom, and he is joined by up to 9 other **magistrates**. They make sure that both attorneys stick to the rules. The **sheriff** and **deputy sheriff** keep order in the courtroom. The **clerk** takes notes of everything that is said. The **jury** is made up of citizens who decide if the defendant is guilty or innocent.

*Here is a picture of a Brentsville courtroom in 1822. Can you unscramble the words to show where each person should sit?*

Brentsville Courthouse courtroom - 1822



1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_