

## “The Records Are All Gone”

In 1862, Brentsville, Virginia was a town and county seat in limbo. Proclamations by the Union Virginia Governor Pierpont and Southern Virginia Governor Letcher were periodically posted on the court house door. Through one of these proclamations, we gain the following insight into local conditions.

In a letter of June 19, 1862 from Jonathan Roberts to Governor Pierpont, he writes: “I have just returned from the three attempts to post your proclamation at the front door of the court houses of Fauquier & Rappahannock Counties, but without success. I have posted them in different parts of Fauquier but was not able to reach Warrenton, without an escort, and Genl. Geary did not think it prudent to send a sufficient escort from his lines to make it safe. He said a small force would be cut off by the citizens of the town. I was unable to reach Rappahannock at any point. I did not see any person that would give me the names of the officers of the county, they would talk freely, and was glad to get your address ‘to the people of Virginia’ of which I have distributed all I had and would be glad to have more as I think it will do a vast amount of good, as the army opens the way, but when I began to talk to them about their aiding in any way, their fears of the consequences immediately manifested itself, and they would not communicate anything.

I have partially succeeded in getting the names of the officers of Prince William, but have yet got all the magistrates. The records are all gone; both in Prince William and Stafford, and the people do not seem to know anything beyond their own neighbourhood. I will do the best I can – can we not have an election of circuit judge without an organization in all the counties of the circuit.”

This mention of the missing records in Prince William County is the first of two letters written by Roberts with this claim. Was Roberts correct? Were the records in Brentsville missing? Did he mean all the records? If this were the case, were they moved temporarily and returned? We do know that before the War of 1812 commenced, the Prince William government, fearing a British invasion, removed records at the county seat in Dumfries, “inland to a more secure place.”

William F. Keys, a school teacher before and after the Civil War, was the company clerk of Company K. 143<sup>rd</sup> Regt. Pennsylvania Volunteers. Keys, an educated person in a position of importance, certainly was aware of his location when he wrote in one of the Prince William County Court Minute Books. “John Keys and Walter Keys and all the rest of you Keyes – if you are any relations of mine you had better keep shady at least til this cruel war is over – Culpeper C.H., April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1864”.

We will have to assume that at least this book was not in Brentsville during a portion of the war.

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