

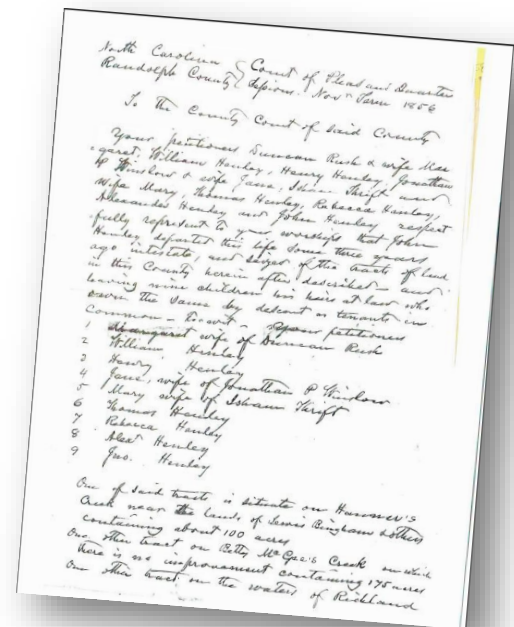
# Transcribing & Abstracting

## Briefly...

Transcribing and abstracting your documents is an important step in our genealogical research process. You will want to do this on all important-to-you ancestors... especially for those brick wall ancestors. If you have a research problem, this is a skill to learn and is part of the problem-solving process.

First, you will want to have done the “Reasonably Exhaustive Research” to find all you can. That is a topic for another day.

Once you have transcribed all documents surrounding the problem ancestor, your next step would be to evaluate the evidence. We’ll go over this in future sessions.



## Four Step Process

Transcribing and then Abstracting is a four-step process.

1. **Transcribe** word for word the document and source it.
2. Copy the transcription to a new document, then **line-out all boilerplate information**.
3. **Remove all boilerplate information**.
4. **Condense**, remove unnecessary punctuation, add source, and **put into sentences**.

## Quick Evaluation

You will want to ask yourself some basic questions about the document you are examining.

- How do you know this is your ancestor?
- Who is in the document (everyone)?
- When did this occur, and could it match your ancestor’s timeline?
- Language of Probabilities – How likely is it that this is your ancestor and why?

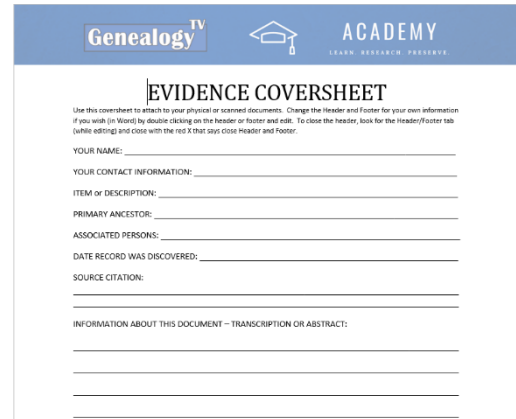
## Evidence Cover Sheet

See Materials in Lesson 4, Topic 3. Will be provided during the class as well. This would be used with physical documents in your possession and could be used as the cover in a PDF document as well.

Smart Research Lesson 4 (Evidence Evaluation), Topic 3 (Transcribing & Abstracting Documents).

### Create a Master of Your Own

Consider creating a master coversheet to save you time. Using my coversheet, save it as a new document something like “Master Coversheet – Save As Before Using.” In Word or other document software, create a header and footer with your personalized information.



The image shows a digital form titled "EVIDENCE COVERSHEET" from Genealogy TV Academy. The header includes the Genealogy TV logo and the Academy name with the tagline "LEARN RESEARCH PRESERVE". Below the title, there is a small instruction: "Use this coversheet to attach to your physical or scanned documents. Change the Header and Footer for your own information if you wish (in Word) by double clicking on the header or footer and edit. To close the header, look for the Header/Footer tab (while editing) and close with the red X that says close Header and Footer." The form contains several fields for user information: YOUR NAME, YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION, ITEM or DESCRIPTION, PRIMARY ANCESTOR, ASSOCIATED PERSONS, DATE RECORD WAS DISCOVERED, and SOURCE CITATION. At the bottom, there is a section for "INFORMATION ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT – TRANSCRIPTION OR ABSTRACT:" followed by several blank lines for text entry.

## Citing Your Source!

**The most important thing you can do when transcribing and abstracting a document is to cite your source on every page!**

If you want to write proper source citations, I highly recommend [Evidence Explained](#) (affiliate link) by Elizabeth Shown Mills.

Below are the main elements of a source citation. You do not need to know how to write a professional source citation if you don't want to, but knowing the primary elements will help you craft your own source information in your notes, transcripts, and abstracts.

The building blocks of a source citation are:

- **Who is in the document**
- **Who authored the document (often a governing body or person)**
- **What is it (name or record type)**
- **Where (the event occurred)**
- **Where it is the original record is now**
- **When it happened (document date)**
- **When you found it**



Not part of the source citation, but is part of the evaluation process and for your research notes:

- Why does it matter?
- How does this fit into my family history?

# Transcribing

A Transcript is “An exact copy of a record, word-for-word, preserving original capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.”<sup>1</sup>

Transcribing your documents is extremely important. By transcribing documents such as wills, journals, letters, postcards, even the back of a photograph, can help you to pay close detailed attention to the information within the document.

As documents fade over time, it is important to transcribe your documents while you can still read them. You want to transcribe everything word for word line by line, including line breaks. You want to put the written document in quotations as shown in Figure 2.

<sup>2</sup>For example, you want to show exactly how the paragraphs are laid out with indents, length of lines, smudges, marks, line-throughs, etc. This document will be transcribed within quote marks.

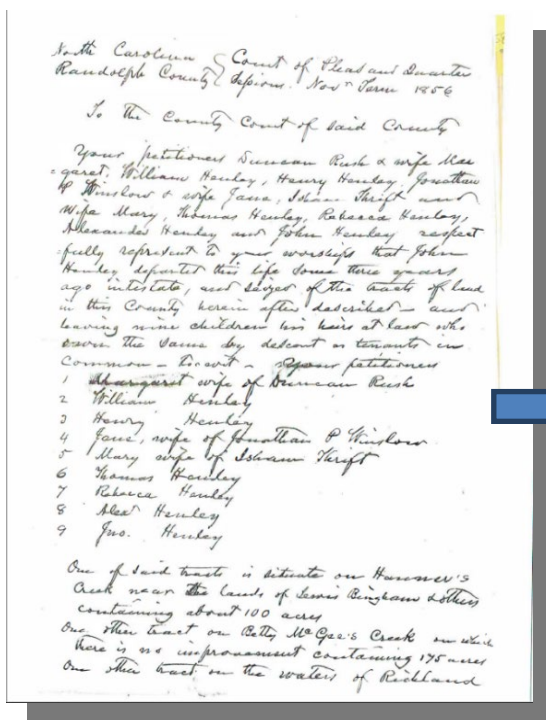


Figure 1 Page 1 of the Original Will of John Henley.

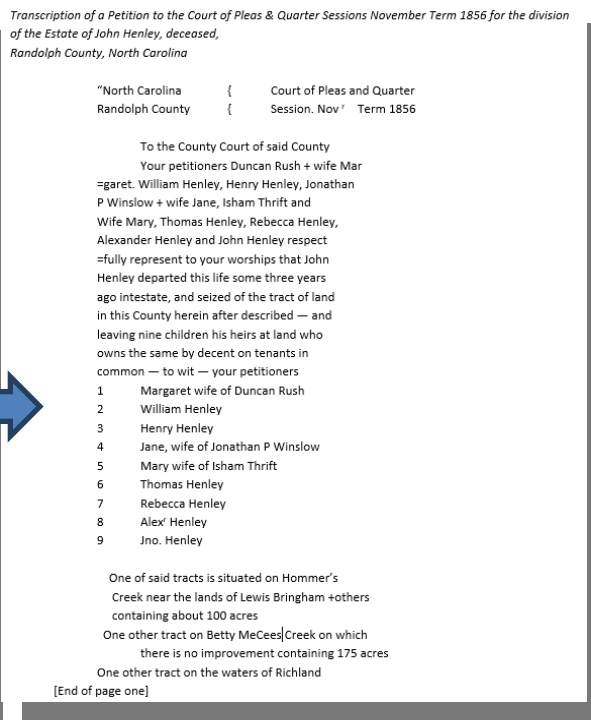


Figure 2 Page 1 of the Transcription of the will of John Henley.

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Professional Genealogy, Preparation, Practice & Standards*, (Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, MD), 330.

<sup>2</sup> Randolph County, North Carolina, Original Estate Records: file C.R. 081.508, “1781-1928 Hendricks (Hendrix) – Henley, Stephen”, estate papers for John Henley, November Term 1856, Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions, NC State Archives & History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

## Title & Footer

Outside of the quotes, every page needs to have a title and a footer with your source information. Footer and Source is not shown in image for space in this handout (previous page), but is in the footnotes.

## Brackets

Use brackets to make notes within a transcribed document to denote things like a smudge on the page. Here are some examples: [Smudge] [Hard to read.] [Page crease through the word.] [?]. You also want to use brackets when noting something like the end of the document's page, if there are multiple pages. For example, [End of page 3].

## Question Marks

A question mark in brackets means that one character was unreadable. You might see several question marks noting several characters were unreadable, something like this "[???]holder," meaning the first three characters were unreadable...but one may be able to figure out that the word might have been "landholder."



## SIC

Use the word "sic" to identify misspellings. This is when you are telling the reader that you are aware of the misspelling or an unusual spelling. This helps the reader know that it is not a typo. You would put this in brackets like this [sic]. This is a misspelled [sic] word to make my point.

## Typical Boilerplate Language

When transcribing, you want to capture all words, but much of it is boilerplate language that will be removed in the abstracting process.

Here is a fake example of what boilerplate language might look like in a will.

"I, John Doe, of said county and provinces aforesaid, being of weak mind and indisposed in body just of sound and indisposing mind and memory thanks be given to and colling [sic] to mind the mortality of my body do make and ordain these to contain my last will and testament of the disposal of such worldly estate wherewith it hath pleased God to bless me with in this life in it's following manner and form."

## Abstracting



An Abstract is "A condensed version of a record, preserving all important detail in original sequence."<sup>3</sup>

While there are general rules for abstracting, some of the decisions about what is left in the abstract from the transcript and its' style can be at your discretion.

---

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Professional Genealogy, Preparation, Practice & Standards*, (Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, MD), 330.

## Best Practices

When we abstract a document, we take the transcription and remove all boilerplate language leaving only the important details of the document. Using the fake example above we would first strike out the boiler plate language. In this case (below) we only leave the name, John Doe.

~~“I, John Doe, of said county and provinces aforesaid, being of weak mind and indisposed in body just of sound and indisposing mind and memory thanks be given to and colling [sic] to mind the mortality of my body do make and ordain these to contain my last will and testament of the disposal of such worldly estate wherewith it hath pleased God to bless me with in this life in it’s following manner and form.”~~

## Abstracting Forms

When **transcribing** forms, you want to transcribe every word in a form or fill-in-the blank documents. You will be amazed at what you notice when you do. For example, the word “informant” can be a clue to your research.

When **abstracting** that same information, some genealogist will use standard font for the words in print and italics for words that are handwritten.

## Abbreviations, Punctuations & Superscripts

It is best to leave names as they were written. For example, “Jno.” could be John or Jonathan. However, Wm. is almost always William.

Remove abbreviations and superscripts that are obvious and spell them out in your abstract, like, Nov<sup>r</sup> for November or Atto<sup>R</sup> for Attorney.

Remove all unnecessary characters that we use in our transcriptions, like, { ~ [] \* etc.

Do use [sic] when noting an uncommon spelling.

## To Include It or Not to Include it in the Abstract?



Leave anything that is going to be a clue to your genealogy. Names and dates are obvious to leave in your abstract, but this might include land descriptions, relationship information “his wife,” “his heirs,” witnesses, informants, how land it to be divided, and anything specific to that document or ancestor(s).

## Page Format

Just like on a transcription, you want a descriptive title and source information on every page. Some genealogists suggest the source information should be at the top. Personally, I like a descriptive title at the top and my source at the bottom. I think this creates a consistency in my reports.

Some professional genealogists say you should capitalize all names (first and last) in your final abstract, some do not. That's your call. I like it because it helps the names jump out at me. I cap all names, not just my ancestors.

"North Carolina { Court of Pleas and Quarter  
 Randolph County { Session, Nov<sup>r</sup> Term 1856

~~To the County Court of said County~~  
 Your petitioners Duncan Rush + wife Mar  
 =garet. William Henley, Henry Henley, Jonathan  
 P Winslow + wife Jane, Isham Thrift and  
 Wife Mary, Thomas Henley, Rebecca Henley,  
 Alexander Henley and John Henley ~~respect~~  
~~=fully~~ represent ~~to your worships~~ that John  
 Henley departed this life some three years  
 ago intestate, and seized ~~of~~ the tract of land  
 in this County ~~herein after described~~ and  
 leaving nine children his heirs ~~at law~~ who  
 own the same by descent as tenants in  
 common ~~to wit~~ your petitioners

- 1 Margaret wife of Duncan Rush
- 2 William Henley
- 3 Henry Henley
- 4 Jane, wife of Jonathan P Winslow
- 5 Mary wife of Isham Thrift
- 6 Thomas Henley
- 7 Rebecca Henley
- 8 Alex<sup>r</sup> Henley
- 9 Jno. Henley

One ~~of said~~ tracts ~~is~~ situated on Hommer's  
 Creek near the lands of Lewis Bringham +others  
 containing about 100 acres  
 One other tract on Betty McCees Creek on which  
 there is no improvement containing 175 acres  
 One other tract on the waters of Richland

[End of page one]

Figure 3 - Lined-Out Transcript

*Abstraction of a Petition to the Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions November Term 1856 for the division of the Estate of John Henley, deceased, Randolph County, North Carolina*

.....  
 North Carolina, Court of Pleas and Quarter, Randolph County, November Term 1856.

DUNCAN RUSH and wife MARGARET. WILLIAM HENLEY, HENRY HENLEY, JONATHAN P WINSLOW and wife JANE, ISHAM THRIFT and wife MARY, THOMAS HENLEY, REBECCA HENLEY, ALEXANDER HENLEY and JOHN HENLEY represent that JOHN HENLEY departed this life some three years ago intestate, and seized the tract of land in this County and leaving nine children his heirs who own the same by decent as tenants in common petitioners, 1. MARGARET WIFE OF DUNCAN RUSH, 2. WILLIAM HENLEY, 3. HENRY HENLEY, 4. JANE, WIFE OF JONATHAN P WINSLOW, 5. MARY WIFE OF ISHAM THRIFT, 6. THOMAS HENLEY, 7. REBECCA HENLEY, 8. ALEX<sup>r</sup> HENLEY, 9. JNO. HENLEY.

One tract situated on Hommer's Creek near the lands of LEWIS BRINGHAM and others containing about 100 acres. One other tract on Betty McCees Creek on which there is no improvement containing 175 acres. One other tract on the waters of Richland on which ISHAM THRIFT resides, containing 200 acres or there about. One other tract on Cable Creek on which is situated the mansion house and on a part of the dower of the widow has been assigned, containing in the whole tract about 280 acres.

The petitioners represent that said land cannot be divided among them without injury to all of them and pray for a decree to sell the lands, subject to the widow's dower in the last-mentioned tract.  
 J. WORTH attorney for petitioners.

.....

Abstracted by Constance Henley Knox on 4 April 2022.

Source Citation:  
 Randolph County, North Carolina, Original Estate Records: file C.R. 081.508, "1781-1928 Hendricks (Hendrix) - Henley, Stephen", estate papers for John Henley, November Term 1856, Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions, NC State Archives & History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Figure 4 - Final and Complete Abstract

## Results

Above is an example of the boilerplate language crossed out (left), followed by the full and complete abstract on the right. This is from our real working example on page three of this handout. I also added a line to differentiate the title and source from the abstract, but that is a personal choice.

On the following pages are the original document, the transcription, the lined-out transcription, and the final abstract so you can see the full documents.

Notice there is a title and source citation on every page.

Also, this original was a two-page document, thus each step has two pages each.

Image of original Petition to the Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions November Term 1856 for the division of the Estate of John Henley, deceased, Randolph County, North Carolina. Page one of two.

North Carolina } Court of Pleas and Quarter  
Randolph County } Sessions. Nov<sup>r</sup> Term 1856

To The County Court of said County

Your petitioners Duncan Rush & wife Margaret, William Henley, Henry Henley, Jonathan P Winslow & wife Jane, Isham Thrift and wife Mary, Thomas Henley, Rebecca Henley, Alexander Henley and John Henley respectfully represent to your worship that John Henley departed this life some three years ago intestate, and seized of the tracts of land in this County herein after described - and leaving nine children his heirs at law who own the same by descent or tenants in common - to-wit -

- 1 Margaret wife of Duncan Rush  
2 William Henley  
3 Henry Henley  
4 Jane, wife of Jonathan P Winslow  
5 Mary wife of Isham Thrift  
6 Thomas Henley  
7 Rebecca Henley  
8 Alex<sup>r</sup> Henley  
9 Jas. Henley

One of said tracts is situate on Hammers' Creek near the lands of Lewis Bingham & others containing about 100 acres  
One other tract on Betty McGe's Creek on which there is no improvement containing 175 acres  
One other tract on the waters of Richland

<sup>4</sup> Randolph County, North Carolina, Original Estate Records: file C.R. 081.508, "1781-1928 Hendricks (Hendrix) - Henley, Stephen", estate papers for John Henley, November Term 1856, Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions, NC State Archives & History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

on which Isham Thrift resides, containing  
200 acres or thereabouts

One other tract on Cable Creek on which  
is situate the mansion house and one  
a part of which the dower of the widow  
has been assigned, containing in the  
whole tract about 280 acres. ~

Your petitioners represent to your  
worships that said land cannot be  
divided among them without main-  
ifest injury to all of them - and they  
therefore pray your worships for a decree  
ordering the Clerk of this Court to sell said  
lands, subject to the widow's dower in  
the last mentioned tract, on such terms  
as to your worships shall seem proper,  
for the purpose of making partition among  
your petitioners and they pray for such  
other & further orders and decrees in the  
premises as the nature of the case may  
require and to your worships may seem  
proper & and they as in duty bound  
will ever pray &c

J. Worth atty  
for petitioners



*Transcription of a Petition to the Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions November Term 1856 for the division of the Estate of John Henley, deceased, Randolph County, North Carolina. Page one of two.*

“North Carolina { Court of Pleas and Quarter  
Randolph County { Session. Nov<sup>r</sup> Term 1856

To the County Court of said County  
Your petitioners Duncan Rush + wife Mar  
=garet. William Henley, Henry Henley, Jonathan  
P Winslow + wife Jane, Isham Thrift and  
Wife Mary, Thomas Henley, Rebecca Henley,  
Alexander Henley and John Henley respect  
=fully represent to your worships that John  
Henley departed this life some three years  
ago intestate, and seized of the tract of land  
in this County herein after described — and  
leaving nine children his heirs at law who  
own the same by decent as tenants in  
common — to wit — your petitioners

- 1 Margaret wife of Duncan Rush
- 2 William Henley
- 3 Henry Henley
- 4 Jane, wife of Jonathan P Winslow
- 5 Mary wife of Isham Thrift
- 6 Thomas Henley
- 7 Rebecca Henley
- 8 Alex<sup>r</sup> Henley
- 9 Jno. Henley

One of said tracts is situated on Hommer’s  
Creek near the lands of Lewis Bringham +others  
containing about 100 acres

One other tract on Betty McGee’s Creek on which  
there is no improvement containing 175 acres

One other tract on the waters of Richland<sup>6</sup>

[End of page one]

---

<sup>6</sup> Randolph County, North Carolina, Original Estate Records: file C.R. 081.508, “1781-1928 Hendricks (Hendrix) – Henley, Stephen”, estate papers for John Henley, November Term 1856, Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions, NC State Archives & History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

*Transcription of a Petition to the Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions November Term 1856 for the division of the Estate of John Henley, deceased, Randolph County, North Carolina. Page two of two.*

[Beginning of page two]

on which Isham Thrift resides, containing 200 acres or there about.

One other tract on Cable Creek on which is situated the mansion house and on a part of which the dower of the widow has been assigned, containing in the whole tract about 280 acres. ~

Your petitioners represent to your worship that said land cannot be divided among them without manifest injury to all of them — and they Therefore pray your worships for a decree ordering the Clerk of this Court to sell said lands , subject to the widow's dower in the last mentioned tract, on such term as to your worships shall seem proper, for the purpose of making partition among your petitioners and they pray for such other + further orders and decrees in the premises as the nature of the case may require and to your worships may seem proper ~ and they as in duty bound will even pray xe

J. Worth atto  
for petitioners”<sup>7</sup>

Transcribed by Constance Henley Knox on 21 May 2016.

---

<sup>7</sup> Randolph County, North Carolina, Original Estate Records: file C.R. 081.508, “1781-1928 Hendricks (Hendrix) – Henley, Stephen”, estate papers for John Henley, November Term 1856, Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions, NC State Archives & History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

*Abstraction Process of a Petition to the Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions November Term 1856 for the division of the Estate of John Henley, deceased, Randolph County, North Carolina. Page one of two.*

“North Carolina            {        Court of Pleas and Quarter  
Randolph County         {        Session. Nov<sup>r</sup> Term 1856

~~To the County Court of said County~~

~~Your petitioners~~ Duncan Rush + wife Mar  
=garet. William Henley, Henry Henley, Jonathan  
P Winslow + wife Jane, Isham Thrift and  
Wife Mary, Thomas Henley, Rebecca Henley,  
Alexander Henley and John Henley ~~respect~~  
~~=fully~~ represent to your worships that John  
Henley departed this life some three years  
ago intestate, and seized of the tract of land  
in this County ~~herein after described~~ — and  
leaving nine children his heirs ~~at law~~ who  
own the same by decent as tenants in  
common — ~~to wit~~ — your petitioners

- 1        Margaret wife of Duncan Rush
- 2        William Henley
- 3        Henry Henley
- 4        Jane, wife of Jonathan P Winslow
- 5        Mary wife of Isham Thrift
- 6        Thomas Henley
- 7        Rebecca Henley
- 8        Alex<sup>r</sup> Henley
- 9        Jno. Henley

One ~~of said~~ tracts is situated on Hommer’s  
Creek near the lands of Lewis Bringham +others  
containing about 100 acres

One other tract on Betty McGee’s Creek on which  
there is no improvement containing 175 acres

One other tract on the waters of Richland<sup>8</sup>

[End of page one]

---

<sup>8</sup> Randolph County, North Carolina, Original Estate Records: file C.R. 081.508, “1781-1928 Hendricks (Hendrix) – Henley, Stephen”, estate papers for John Henley, November Term 1856, Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions, NC State Archives & History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

*Abstraction Process of a Petition to the Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions November Term 1856 for the division of the Estate of John Henley, deceased, Randolph County, North Carolina. Page two of two.*

on which Isham Thrift resides, containing 200 acres or there about.

One other tract on Cable Creek on which is situated the mansion house and on a part of ~~which~~ the dower of the widow has been assigned, containing in the whole tract about 280 acres. ~

~~Your~~ petitioners represent ~~to your~~ ~~worship~~ that said land cannot be divided among them without ~~mani-~~ ~~=fest~~ injury to all of them — and they ~~Therefore~~ pray ~~your worships~~ for a decree ~~ordering the Clerk of this Court~~ to sell said lands , subject to the widow's dower in the last mentioned tract, ~~on such term~~ ~~as to your worships shall seem proper,~~ for the purpose of making partition among ~~your petitioners and they pray for such~~ other + further orders and decrees in the premises as the nature of the case may require and to ~~your worships may seem~~ proper ~ and they as in duty bound will even pray ~~xe~~

J. Worth atto  
for petitioners”<sup>9</sup>

Transcribed by Constance Henley Knox on 21 May 2016.

---

<sup>9</sup> Randolph County, North Carolina, Original Estate Records: file C.R. 081.508, “1781-1928 Hendricks (Hendrix) – Henley, Stephen”, estate papers for John Henley, November Term 1856, Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions, NC State Archives & History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

*Abstraction of a Petition to the Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions November Term 1856 for the division of the Estate of John Henley, deceased, Randolph County, North Carolina*

.....

North Carolina, Court of Pleas and Quarter, Randolph County, November Term 1856.

DUNCAN RUSH and wife MARGARET. WILLIAM HENLEY, HENRY HENLEY, JONATHAN P WINSLOW and wife JANE, ISHAM THRIFT and wife MARY, THOMAS HENLEY, REBECCA HENLEY, ALEXANDER HENLEY and JOHN HENLEY represent that JOHN HENLEY departed this life some three years ago intestate, and seized the tract of land in this County and leaving nine children his heirs who own the same by decent as tenants in common petitioners, 1. MARGARET wife of DUNCAN RUSH, 2. WILLIAM HENLEY, 3. HENRY HENLEY, 4. JANE, wife of JONATHAN P WINSLOW, 5. MARY wife of ISHAM THRIFT, 6. THOMAS HENLEY, 7. REBECCA HENLEY, 8. ALEX<sup>R</sup> HENLEY, 9. JNO. HENLEY.

One tract situated on Hommer's Creek near the lands of LEWIS BRINGHAM and others containing about 100 acres. One other tract on Betty McGee's Creek on which there is no improvement containing 175 acres. One other tract on the waters of Richland on which ISHAM THRIFT resides, containing 200 acres or there about. One other tract on Cable Creek on which is situated the mansion house and on a part of the dower of the widow has been assigned, containing in the whole tract about 280 acres.

The petitioners represent that said land cannot be divided among them without injury to all of them and pray for a decree to sell the lands, subject to the widow's dower in the last-mentioned tract.  
J. WORTH attorney for petitioners.

.....

Abstracted by Constance Henley Knox on 4 April 2022. <sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Constance Henley Knox, *Abstract of the Estate Records for John Henley, 1856*, privately held by Constance H. Knox, [Address for private use], citing; Randolph County, North Carolina, Original Estate Records: file C.R. 081.508, "1781-1928 Hendricks (Hendrix) – Henley, Stephen", estate papers for John Henley, November Term 1856, Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions, NC State Archives & History, Raleigh, North Carolina.