

“It was an unfriendly & uncalled for act in the constable & his Posse to seize upon my negroes.”

To John A. Washington, Esqr. Of Mt. Vernon

My dear Sir,

I am just informed that my negroes are to be tried before you for certain offences, which they are supposed to have committed against the law during the recent Christmas holidays.

I am glad at least that they will receive their trial before **a man of honor & sensibility to the rights of & feelings of the slave** as well as the slaveholder & feeling that confidence in you, yield to this painful necessity, urged upon me however at a time by those who might under the circumstances of my family, have had a gentler feeling for me.

This note will be handed to you by Mr. Gaines, my overseer, & as he must represent my interests in the subject, it will not be amiss I hope to say to you that I know him to be an upright man – disposed at all times to respect the laws & those appointed to administer them. I would but think therefore that it was at least an unfriendly & uncalled for act in the constable & his Posse to seize upon my negroes & alarm them in all directions in his absence. He was from home but for an hour on business & would willingly, had he known of the matter, aided the officer in carrying out his purpose.

As it was, the first information brought me was from frightened women & children & I confess the whole thing has shocked me a good deal.

But thank God it is now in your hands.

Most truly & respectfully yours,

B. C. Mason.

Address-leaf: "John Augustine Washington of Mount Vernon." Hand-carried by Gaines. Docket: "Mrs. Betsy C. Mason/Trial of her negroes."

This rare letter was written from Huntley, an early 19th-century Federal-style villa and farm in the Hybla Valley area of Fairfax County, Virginia, by Elizabeth Price Mason, widow of a grandson of George Mason of Gunston Hall.