

Box 5, Folder 6
Governor Pierpont's Executive papers
Richmond Virginia

To his Excellency Governor Pierpont of Virginia

Your petitioners most respectfully represent that at the February term 1862, of the County Court of Kanawha County, a Negro man slave named John, the property of the late William Dickinson, was tried and convicted, and the sentence of death pronounced against him, for the murder of one Daniel P. Skinnell.

Your petitioners, the relations of the late Col. Dickinson and others, the neighbors of the same, who are well acquainted with John, and his general good character, and the circumstances attending this unfortunate affair: feel a deep interest in the fate of John, he has uniformly been a faithful, biddable, & peaceable slave, very intelligent & trusty, & by his good conduct & character, became the favorite of his late master and his old partner the late Mr. Joel Shrewsbury, both of whom could well tell a good from an undeserving servant.

The overseer (Mr. Skinnell) who was killed, was recently from Old Virginia, where he had been raised, and where tis known, slaves are managed differently, from what they are on Kanawha.

Some of your petitions think Mr. Skinnell was violent & cruel to slaves, others think he was an excellent manager, honest & industrious, yet probably quick tempered & decisive to act when aroused; tis known he generally carried with him a pistol, a weapon no overseer of slaves should ever carry, especially one of quick temperament, as they are too handy to get in a fit of passion, before one has time to deliberate.

The testimony in the case, well warrants the presumption that Mr. Skinnell commenced beating John hastily & in a passion (when the hands were going home to dinner) without any known adequate cause, certainly at an improper time & with an improper instrument, & in an improper manner. John as an intelligent being, with like feelings & passions & feeling the wrongs inflicted upon him, without explanation of cause, knew if he ran, he might be shot with the pistol, which he knew Mr. Skinnell had, hastily & before he had time to deliberate, nature like, returned a blow with the tool he was carrying home on his shoulder (a pitch fork) at which moment Mr. Skinnell dropped his ax pole & began to draw his pistol; then the battle so hastily began, became at once a life & death struggle, if John had ran the pistol ball would have overtaken him; the natural love he had for his own life, forced him to repeat the blows, till in the fall of Mr. Skinnell the pistol fell at his side, which was grasped by John and fired twice, terminating the struggle, in the death of Mr. Skinnell.

In view of the uniform good character & conduct of John, together with the circumstances, attending this unfortunate affair as detailed in the testimony without malice or deliberation, and time for reflection: suddenly thrown upon him without explanation of cause it seems to lack everything to constitute it willful & deliberate murder, for which the life of a human being should be taken. John a poor slave, now in close confinement, & has been for seven months, is wholly unable to present his claims before you, even for the moderation of the severity of the sentence under which he stands.

In justice to our own feelings, and in behalf of a good servant, we most sincerely hope that in this case, your honor will extend the pardoning power, so far, as to commute the sentence of death, for sale and transportation, we sincerely believe this is truly a case where justice should

be tempered by mercy; with confidence in your clemency, mercy, & justice; we hope this our application, in his behalf may not be in vain.

March 25, 1862

(The following signatures were very difficult to transcribe and reflect my opinion. Ron Turner)

J. G. Knight
C. H. Hatcher
Mrs. Caroline Quarrier
Miss H. Ruffner
__ G. Slack
Wm. W. Kelly
Jno A. T-----?
E. W. Newton
R. S. Smithers?
M. Bryan
E./C. Rock?
L. J. Woodyard
Wm. D. Shrewsbury Jr.
James Ruffner
A. Armstrong
N. B. Cabell
_. Patrick

W. A. Key
P. (?) H. Keys
Mrs. T. E. Clarkson
Miss ____ Clarkson
James Atkinson
Jno Slack
George Ritter
Alex T. Laidley
F. Walker
S. T. Smithers?
W. P. Phazor?
John D. Lewis
Wm. D. Shrewsbury Sr.
J. C. Shrewsbury
Thos Scott
John P-----

Thos. Waggener
A. W. Quarrier
Mrs. E. Q. Smith
Mrs. Helen Q. Miller
John Slack Jr.
J. Smith
W. Kelly
Wm. Dickinson Jr.
C. Hedrick
W. M. R----son?
J. F. Hubbard
E. D. Vandall
D. Shrewsbury
H. H. Moore?/Wood?
C. C. Coon
Andrew Parks