NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Rescuing African American Kidnapping Victims in Philadelphia as Documented in the Joseph Watson Papers at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Among the recently processed and newly accessible collections housed at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania are the papers of Philadelphia mayor Joseph Watson. The youngest son of Isaac Watson and Ann Jenks, Joseph Watson (1784–1841) was raised in Middletown, Bucks County, where his father worked as a carpenter and joiner.¹ The Watsons were members of the Society of Friends and attended the Middletown Monthly Meeting and later the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting.² By 1805, when Watson was twenty-one, he had set up shop as a lumber merchant and carpenter in Philadelphia at 84 Crown Street, and by 1821 he formed a partnership with Josiah Bunting in the lumber business.³ It was also in the 1820s that Watson entered Philadelphia politics, first becoming an alderman, serving on the Common Council, and then mayor. Each year the aldermen elected a mayor (before 1826 from among their own members and after 1826 from the citizenry of Philadelphia), and Watson was elected mayor of Philadelphia in 1824, 1825, 1826, and 1827 before losing to George

¹ Church records of the Quakers in Bucks County record that Isaac Watson and Ann Jenks were married February 20, 1770. There is no church record of Joseph Watson’s birth. See Anna Miller Watring and F. Edward Wright, Bucks County Pennsylvania Church Records of the 17th and 18th Centuries, 3 vols. (Westminster, MD, 1994), 2:235–36.
² Jane W. T. Brey, A Quaker Saga: The Watsons of Strawberyhowe, the Wildmans, and Other Allied Families from England’s North Counties and Lower Bucks County in Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1967), 299. In 1780 Isaac Watson was proposed and approved as clerk of the Middletown Monthly Meeting.

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Mifflin Dallas in 1828.\textsuperscript{4} Watson’s duties as mayor included presiding over weddings, city functions, making appointments, and greeting foreign visitors to the city. For example, in August 1824, Watson welcomed the Marquis de Lafayette of France to the City of Brotherly Love. The \textit{North American} reported that Lafayette “remained in Philadelphia a week, which was given over to parades, banquets, balls and festivities of all kinds.”\textsuperscript{5} But not all of Watson’s duties were of a ceremonial or social nature. The Joseph Watson Papers disclose that he received numerous letters from persons seeking employment, from inmates seeking pardons, as well as a few from southerners writing about alleged kidnappings of the city’s African American children. Watson, a Quaker, took an active role in establishing the free status of these children. This interesting collection of letters, therefore, gives us a glimpse of one of the perils faced by the most vulnerable residents of this city just north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

The kidnappings documented in the Joseph Watson Papers must be understood within a broader historical context. Carol Wilson argues that such “kidnapping had precedents in the forcing of European whites into naval and colonial servitude, and in the abduction of African peoples into slavery. Thus the kidnapping of free blacks into slavery was not an historical anomaly.”\textsuperscript{6} Julie Winch has noted that while “man stealing” did occur in the North before the American Revolutionary War, afterwards this activity evolved into “a well-organized business venture.”\textsuperscript{7} Kidnappings of both adults and children became more frequent, and Philadelphia’s African American community became alarmed.\textsuperscript{8} In 1800 black clergy-men Richard Allen and Absalom Jones sent a “Petition of the People of Colour, Freemen within the City and Suburbs of Philadelphia” to Congress, signed by seventy-three African Americans, which protested “the kidnapping those of our Brethren that are free” and requested con-


\textsuperscript{6} Carol Wilson, \textit{Freedom at Risk: The Kidnapping of Free Blacks in America, 1780–1865} (Lexington, KY, 1994), 4.


\textsuperscript{8} Isaac Hopper includes in his kidnapping tales a story about a gang operating out of Delaware very similar to the Cannon-Johnson gang mentioned in the Watson Papers. See Daniel E. Meaders, comp., \textit{Kidnappers in Philadelphia: Isaac Hopper's Tales of Oppression, 1780–1843} (New York, 1994).
gressional action.\textsuperscript{9} Congress ignored that petition but seven years later took action that made Richard Allen and other black Philadelphians rejoice: it passed a law ending the importation of slaves into the United States.\textsuperscript{10} The American ban on the foreign slave trade coincided with the adoption of Eli Whitney's cotton gin in the South. The subsequent growth of the cotton trade and resulting increased demand for slaves, together with a decline in the supply of imported Africans, motivated kidnappers to capture free African Americans to sell on the slave auction block.\textsuperscript{11} A favorite hunting ground of kidnappers was the city of Philadelphia, which had the largest free black population in the North. Furthermore, in the 1820s kidnappers could go about their business in Philadelphia with virtually no interference from the law.

Philadelphia had no professional police department, in the modern sense of the term, during the antebellum period, though law-abiding citizens had long had a way of "keeping the peace."\textsuperscript{12} In 1700 Philadelphians inaugurated a form of citizen participation known as the town watch, a practice inherited from England. The watchmen lighted the street lamps, cried out the hour, and chased burglars away from homes and businesses. In 1751 the Pennsylvania General Assembly authorized Philadelphia's first paid police agency.\textsuperscript{13} These men, called "wardens," were charged with patrolling the streets, searching for vagrants, disorderly persons, and criminals, and bringing such persons before the Mayor's Court.\textsuperscript{14} In 1814 the city appointed its first police captain and lieutenant for the night watch and in 1827 required watchmen to take oaths to protect citizens and


\textsuperscript{10} An Act to prohibit the importation of slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States, from and after the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eight, in \textit{Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America}, 8 vols. (Boston, 1845–1848), 2:426, statute 2, ch. 22.


property. Another reform occurred in 1833 when the city was divided into four police districts, each with a police captain, four lieutenants, and four inspectors. But even these improvements fell short of what Philadelphia needed for law enforcement. With the city’s total population in 1830 just over 188,700, Philadelphia had one patrolman for about every 3,350 people. Thus Joseph Watson was the “chief of a not very effective police. In return for the post, he was required to handle riots and tumults, which were not uncommon.” The mayor also presided over what was called the Mayor’s Court. Created under the 1789 Philadelphia city charter to replace the city court established under the 1701 charter issued by William Penn, the Mayor’s Court consisted of the mayor, the recorder, and two aldermen. It met quarterly, on the first Monday in September and on the third Monday in December, March, and June. Through the Mayor’s Court, Watson became familiar with criminal cases in his city. Perhaps the most heartbreaking cases were those involving the abduction of African American children.

In Philadelphia, especially because of its proximity to the slave state of Delaware, free African Americans lived in fear of kidnappers, and children were particularly vulnerable because of their age, size, and marginal position in society. Although the Society of Friends established an orphanage for colored children in 1822, the Friends limited admission to children between the ages of eighteen months and eight years. It is not clear what became of those orphans older than eight. Although Philadelphia opened a House of Refuge for wayward youngsters in 1828, no black children were admitted after the first year. A House of Refuge for Colored Children would not be established in Philadelphia until 1849. According to Christopher Span, “prior to its founding, African

15 Wadman and Allison, To Protect and to Serve, 33.
16 Sprogle, Philadelphia Police, 75–76; Wadman and Allison, To Protect and to Serve, 24; Modern police history in Philadelphia began in the 1850s with the consolidation of the city’s districts and professionalizing of the police force. See Bowdren, “Brief History of the Philadelphia Police Department.” In 1830 the aggregate population of Philadelphia was 188,797, of which 15,624 were African American. See Edward Raymond Turner, The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery—Servitude—Freedom, 1638–1861 (New York, 1969), appendix, “Population of Philadelphia,” 253.
American children accused of crime in Philadelphia were either sent to the Almshouse, were indentured out as apprentices to white landowners, cared for in a private institution, or simply sent to prison.”19 Those African American children who fended for themselves in the streets risked being kidnapped. The United States Gazette reported in 1827 that “it is believed that there have been at least 30 cases of kidnapping in our city and county in the last 2 or 3 years.”20 Many were black youngsters who could not expect much sympathy from the general public.

While the kidnapping of a white person usually resulted in swift action to rescue the victim and punish the kidnappers, the same crime committed against an African American met with apathy among most white citizens. This response was due as much to what we call today “racial profiling” as to insensitivity. For example, a white Philadelphian witnessing a kidnapping might assume that a black person was a fugitive slave. Similarly, a struggle between a black child and a black adult might appear to be simply an adult disciplining a child, prompting white witnesses to watch in silence. Even if white observers were aware that the victim (child or adult) was a free person, racism not only helped perpetuate the crime but also stalled prosecution. White politicians and sheriffs hesitated to act for fear of angering voters and losing their jobs. Furthermore, many kidnapping and fugitive slave cases came before “magistrates who were either known to be friendly to the cause of slavery or who were easily bribed.”21 In the South, African Americans could not legally testify in court against a white person. Thus a black witness to a kidnapping could not testify in a southern court, though a northern white witness could. On the other hand, white southerners, even non–slave owners, seldom became involved in these cases, and it was even rarer for state officials such as attorney generals or governors to intervene in black kidnapping cases. As Carol Wilson points out, “even if a kidnapped slave succeeded in convincing a white person of his or her story, few white southerners would be willing to expend time and money, as well as incurring the wrath of their neigh-


20 United States Gazette, June 21, 1827; Winch puts the number of kidnappings per year between forty and sixty. Winch, “Philadelphia and the Other Underground Railroad,” 4.

21 Margaret H. Bacon, History of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the Relief of Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, and for Improving the Condition of the African Race (Philadelphia, 1959), 13.
bors, in pressing the victim’s case.” Such reluctance made it extremely difficult for people like Joseph Watson and his constable Samuel Garrigues to rescue kidnapped African Americans. Victims faced physical abuse or death if they dared cry out for help, proclaim their free status, or attempt to escape. In other words, a kidnapped free black person sold into slavery had almost no chance of being free again.

The Joseph Watson Papers at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, though, document how some African American kidnapping victims did escape slavery. Such victims depended upon the benevolence of both white northerners and southerners. In 1826, two white planters from Mississippi took the unusual step of contacting Mayor Joseph Watson about some suspicious slave traders: Jesse Cannon and Joe Johnson, “the latter described by the Delaware attorney general as ‘perhaps the most celebrated kidnapper and Negro stealer in the country.’” Cannon and Johnson were members of the Cannon-Johnson family, a kidnapping ring operating out of Delaware and Maryland. The press claimed that Joe Johnson was the ringleader. But legend has it that Patty Cannon, wife of Jesse and mother-in-law or sister-in-law of Joe, was the true gang leader. Patty Cannon lived near the Nanticoke River on the Maryland-Delaware line and operated a tavern catering mainly to slave traders and other travelers. It was through her contacts with slave dealers that she became involved in the business of kidnapping free African Americans. For more than ten years, she was able to elude capture by bribing local sheriffs and by strategically locating her house on the boundary of two states and three counties, Dorchester and Caroline counties in Maryland, and Sussex County in Delaware.

22 Wilson, Freedom at Risk, 6
24 Hal Roth, The Monster’s Handsome Face: Patty Cannon in Fiction and Fact (Vienna, MD, 1998), 27; Wilson, Freedom at Risk, 20, 36–37. Patty Cannon’s house was near Johnson’s Cross Roads, now called Reliance, Delaware. See William Ecenberger, Walkin’ the Line: A Journey from Past to Present along the Mason-Dixon (New York, 2000), 50; R. W. Messenger, Patty Cannon Administers Justice or Joe Johnson’s Last Kidnapping (Cambridge, MD, 1960), 5. There is much conflicting information about Patty Cannon, and it is difficult to separate fact from fiction. Her husband is sometimes identified as Alphonso Cannon, sometimes as Jesse Cannon. Joe Johnson is identified as her husband in some accounts, as her son-in-law in others, and as her brother-in-law in yet others. Some accounts claim that Patty Cannon killed her husband, while others count him as part of her gang. See also “Piracy’ on the Chesapeake Bay in the 1800s,” http://www.rumskulls.org/1800s.html; Clinton Jackson and Erastus E. Barclay, Narrative and Confessions of Lucretia P. Cannon (New York, 1841).
Although the Cannons and Johnsons were white, their “gang” included some African American men. Among them were Henry Carr and John Purnell, who worked as decoys in Philadelphia. Carr was linked to an oyster shop in Philadelphia, while Purnell was thought to be a resident of Snow Hill, Maryland. Court records describe Purnell, aged twenty-six, as a “yellow” or mulatto man, five-foot three-inches tall, and a shoemaker by occupation. He used various aliases, including “John Smith,” “James Morris,” “Spencer Thomas,” and “Isaac Purnell.”

John Purnell’s participation in the Cannon-Johnson gang is documented in the Joseph Watson Papers. In August 1825, Purnell approached fifteen-year-old Sam Scomp on the Market Street wharf and offered to pay him to unload watermelons from a boat. Scomp agreed to the job, but once on the boat, Joe Johnson grabbed him and locked him in the hold with two other African American boys, Enos Tilghman and Alexander Manlove. These three were quickly joined by two more black boys, Cornelius Sinclair and a boy who called himself Joe Johnson (no relation to the kidnapper). That night they sailed for kidnapper Joe Johnson’s house in Delaware where, after a week’s sailing, they were chained in irons in the attic. Two women, Mary Fisher, who claimed to be free, and Maria Neal, who apparently admitted to being a legitimate slave, joined the boys there. Ebenezer Johnson, Joe’s brother, took the entire group south both by sea and land to Alabama, where he sold Cornelius Sinclair as a slave in Tuscaloosa. Johnson beat the boys in his

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custody severely, and one boy, Joe Johnson, died from a beating on December 21, 1825, the day the group arrived in Rocky Spring, Mississippi. It was there that Ebenezer Johnson tried to sell Scomp and Tilghman to the planter John Hamilton, who was accompanied by John Henderson, a friend and attorney.\textsuperscript{27} 

Nothing is known about John Hamilton's background or of his plantation in Claiborne County at the time of the kidnappings. But it is known that in 1820 when he was living in Amite County, Mississippi, Hamilton owned seven slaves: three males and three females between the ages of fourteen and twenty-six, and one female age forty-five or older.\textsuperscript{28} John Henderson (1797–1857) was born in Bridgeton, New Jersey, and worked as a flatboat man on the Mississippi River before studying law in Cincinnati and then moving to Mississippi. Henderson first practiced law in Woodville, Wilkinson County. At the time of the 1820 census Henderson owned no slaves. He served in the Mississippi senate from 1835 to 1836 and in the U.S. Senate, as a Whig, from 1839 to 1845. In 1851 he was tried in federal district court in New Orleans for his alleged role in expeditions against Cuba, but was acquitted.\textsuperscript{29} 

During Ebenezer Johnson's "sales pitch," Scomp courageously spoke up and told Hamilton and Henderson the story of his kidnapping and of Joe Johnson's death. The Mississippians believed Scomp's story and those of the other kidnapping victims. Put on the defensive, Ebenezer Johnson agreed to allow Hamilton temporary custody of the boys Tilghman, Manlove, and Scomp and of Mary Fisher, pending his return from Virginia with proof of his ownership of the supposed slaves. Suspicious of Johnson, Hamilton and Henderson wrote Mayor Watson about the case.\textsuperscript{30} 

\textsuperscript{27} John Henderson to JW, Jan. 2, 1826; J. W. Hamilton to JW, Jan. 27, 1826; John Henderson to JW, Mar. 20, 1826, all in the Joseph Watson Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In the Watson Papers, sometimes Hamilton signed his name as "J. W. Hamilton." Unless otherwise noted, all Watson correspondence cited is from the Watson Papers. Tilghman's name is often spelled "Tilman" in the Watson Papers. 

\textsuperscript{28} Federal Census,1820, Amite County, MS, microfilm ser. M33, roll 57, p. 29. 

\textsuperscript{29} Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774–Present (Washington, DC, 1998), 1297; Federal Census, 1820, Claiborne County, MS, roll 58, p. 15; Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi (Chicago, 1891); D. Clayton James, Antebellum Natchez (Baton Rouge, LA, [1968]), 277. Mississippi became a state in 1817 and hence the 1820 federal census was the first taken in Mississippi. 

Upon receipt of Henderson's initial letter, Watson went into action. First, he took various affidavits from family, friends, and employers of the kidnapping victims. Meanwhile, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society also collected documentation on the free status of the boys. In 1827 an auxiliary of the society, known as The Protecting Society of the City and County of Philadelphia for the Prevention of Kidnapping and Man-Stealing, was formed to help recover their kin and friends who had been kidnapped.

Southern courts required testimony by white witnesses, thus letters from northern whites often provided the most critical evidence in these cases. Obtaining such testimony was difficult because few white people could be found who knew these children. The letters collected by the abolition society and sent by Watson with the affidavits to Henderson and Hamilton in Mississippi were, thus, instrumental.\(^\text{31}\) For example, in the case of Cornelius Sinclair, Alabama asked for both written testimony from white people and a live witness to testify that the boy was born free.\(^\text{32}\) Because Sinclair's lawyer had written documents signed by white Philadelphians and a live witness who testified for him in an Alabama court, Sinclair was set free.

Watson also depended upon the cooperation of white southerners, for without their help the kidnapping victims had little chance of being liberated. It was Henderson and Hamilton who first brought the plight of these African Americans to Watson's attention in January 1826. Hamilton offered Watson assistance in returning the kidnap victims, telling him that "the cause of humanity has governed me in stopping these people.\(^\text{33}\) Mississippi attorney general Richard Stockton also felt compelled by moral duty to help Watson, explaining "the state of Mississippi, is a slave holding state, but be assured, Sir, there is no community that holds in greater abhorrence, the infamous traffic carried on by negro stealers.\(^\text{34}\)"


\(^\text{32}\) Joshua Boucher to JW, Jan. 17, 1827. The documents sent by Watson concerning Sinclair included depositions from his school teacher, R. M. Whitney, a merchant, and his father, Joseph Sinclair.

\(^\text{33}\) J. W. Hamilton to JW, Jan. 27, 1826.

Anticipating Hamilton’s further help, in March 1826 Watson mailed him a cache of thirty-six documents he assembled, including two indentures, three attestations by Watson regarding judges and court officials, four warrants, indictments and conviction records regarding the Cannon-Johnson gang, and nineteen depositions from relatives, employers, and acquaintances of the abducted Philadelphians. Watson also asked Hamilton to take Tilghman and Scomp to Benjamin Morgan, a New Orleans merchant, who would then send the children back to Philadelphia.

Hamilton took some risk in helping to establish the free status of these African Americans. In the spring of 1826 Hamilton became more cautious, because in March Ebenezer Johnson’s attorney filed a suit against Hamilton for possession of the alleged slaves. Henderson sought to allay Hamilton’s fears, telling Watson, “I . . . stated to him the delay that would probably ensue in a suit at law, and as the evidence appeared to be conclusive and there being very little probability of Johnston ever coming to claim them, I requested him to send them to Mr. Morgan at New Orleans.” In response, Hamilton said he would first have to consult his lawyer. Several days later, however, Hamilton agreed to send Enos Tilghman and Sam Scomp to New Orleans.

When the boys arrived in New Orleans, Benjamin Morgan put Tilghman and Scomp aboard a vessel bound for Philadelphia. Upon arrival in Philadelphia, the two boys gave depositions to Mayor Watson, claiming that John Purnell, alias “John Smith,” had kidnapped them. Persuaded that Tilghman and Scomp were in fact free, Watson reported to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society that the case of Tilghman and Scomp had been “concluded.”

The case may have been “concluded” in respect to the safe return of the two boys to Philadelphia. The case concerning their kidnappers, however, was far from over. Pennsylvania’s Governor John Schultz issued extradition warrants for the Cannon-Johnson gang to officials in Virginia, Alabama, and Mississippi. A welcome break in the case came in July

36 JW to J. W. Hamilton and John Henderson, Mar. 10, 1826.
37 John Henderson to JW, May 5, 1826.
38 John Henderson to JW, May 8, 1826.
40 James Trimble to JW, Mar. 29, 1826.
1826 when a justice of the peace in Gloucester County, New Jersey, wrote to Mayor Watson that “John Smith” had been sighted in that area. In the spring of 1827, “William Pettigon, alias Bill Paragee, a white man, of Nanticoke River” was arrested and charged with “being the captain of Joe Johnson’s sloop Little John and an active conspirator in the kidnapping of a number of black children.” Pettigon, however, died on June 7, 1827, before his trial.

In January 1827, Watson appealed to the public for help, publishing a letter in the Democratic Press on January 25, 1827. “I am induced thus to address my Fellow-Citizens, as well as apprise them of this outrage on their peace and sovereignty,” he wrote, “with a view to the production of any information or legal evidence at present unknown to me, that is connected with this case or any other case of unpunished Kidnapping or Man Stealing, that has occurred in our neighbourhood, within the last three years.” Then, with money received from city council, Watson offered a reward of five hundred dollars for information leading to the apprehension of the kidnappers and publicized this notice in many national newspapers.

Henry Carr was captured by December 1826 and put in the Arch Street Prison to await trial in the Mayor’s Court. Yet his colleague John Purnell eluded the law for a year before he was seized by officials in Boston in June 1827. Under orders from Mayor Watson, Garrigues brought Purnell back to Philadelphia to face kidnapping charges. After hearing the evidence collected by Watson, the grand jury ordered Purnell bound over for trial in both the Mayor’s Court and the Quarter Sessions Court in 1827. Henry Carr and John Purnell were tried together in the Mayor’s Court, and Cornelius Sinclair and Alex Manlove were witnesses for the prosecution. The court found Carr and Purnell not guilty. Carr then left Philadelphia for Alabama, where he died in Mobile in July 1828.

41 Job Brown to JW, July 5, 1826.
42 Freedom’s Journal, June 8, 1827.
44 Mayor’s Court Docket, Dec. and Mar. Sessions, 1827; United States Gazette, June 14, 1827; Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser, June 1 and 14, 1827.
In the Quarter Sessions Court, Purnell faced trial alone. Cornelius Sinclair, Alex Manlove, Enos Tilghman, and Sam Scomp testified on the witness stand. Scomp reportedly said he considered Purnell’s decoying—having him unload watermelons—“a marvelously good joke.” The boy “laughed at the recollection of the treatment he had received, and the audience laughed with him, for there was much [humor] both in the manner and matter of his testimony.” This time, though, Purnell was found guilty on two counts of kidnapping. He was fined four thousand dollars and sentenced to forty-two years in jail.47 Purnell never served his full sentence. He died in Walnut Street Prison on March 26, 1833.48

Despite his work, Watson failed to capture any of the important white members of the Cannon-Johnson gang. He was, however, apprised from time to time of the whereabouts of the Johnsons. Delawarean Jesse Green wrote in February 1826, “Ebenezer F. Johnson has Lately Returned . . . with his wife from Alabama where he has been on an Excursion selling negroes.” In March 1827 Green reported that the Johnsons “had Returned with their Family above 10 or 12 days ago—and we can have no Doubt but will resume their old Business of kidnapping.” In reply, Watson sent his constable Samuel P. Garrigues to Delaware to investigate. By the time Garrigues arrived in Delaware to confer with Green, the Johnson brothers ostensibly had already fled to the South.49 Only Patty Cannon was eventually arrested in Delaware on charges not of kidnapping but of homicide, in 1829. After confessing to the murder of almost two dozen people, including a baby she killed by throwing it into a fire, Patty Cannon committed suicide in jail before her trial.50

The city budget allocated Watson $500 a year for “police work.” Yet by 1828 Watson had spent nearly $2,500 on the kidnapping cases and had been given an additional $1,500 from the city council. He had secured the release of ten kidnap victims but failed to establish the freedom of two dozen more “for want of some white person who could prove that they

47 Court of Quarter Sessions, Docket, June Sessions, June 16, 1827; Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser, June 19, 1827.
48 Prison Sentence Docket, 1825–1835, no. 124, Philadelphia City Archives. Henry Carr is listed in the Mayor’s Court Docket but not in the Prison Sentence Docket. Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser, June 19, 1827.
49 Jesse Green to JW, Feb. 28, 1826; Jesse Green to JW, Mar. 12, 1827; JW to Jesse Green, Mar. 20, 1826, written at the bottom of Green to JW, Feb. 28, 1826.
50 Wilson, Freedom at Risk, 37; Roth, Monster’s Handsome Face, 78.
were entitled to it." Watson must have felt frustrated because even though he was mayor of Philadelphia, "he could not prevent them from being kidnapped in the first place." After leaving office Watson became president of the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company in 1830. He held that position until his death on April 9, 1841, at age fifty-seven. He was survived by his wife, the former Harriet Snowden of Baltimore, but no children.

Joseph Watson's papers testify to his courage and humanity, qualities recognized by John Henderson in an 1827 letter: "The extraordinary exertions of yourself, in procuring in so short a time, the voluminous mass of testimony which you forwarded to me, going to prove, beyond a doubt, the freedom of those unfortunate people, evince a degree of zeal in the cause of humanity exceeding any thing I can lay claim to on this occasion." Acting much like a district attorney, Watson investigated the crimes, presented evidence to the grand jury, and held trials in the Mayor's Court. He rescued a number of kidnapped African Americans and captured several people associated with the Cannon-Johnson gang. Watson's papers also illuminate a topic seldom appreciated by American social historians: African Americans as victims of crime. While scholars such as Leslie Patrick-Stamp have pioneered studies of African Americans in the criminal justice system in Pennsylvania, such work needs to be balanced by research into how the rights of African American victims of crime, like the black children of Watson's Philadelphia, were or were not respected. The following documents are from the Joseph Watson Papers.

51 John Henderson to JW, Dec. 1, 1827.
56 These letters have been transcribed as literally as possible. Spelling and punctuation have been retained. Strikeouts are rendered as such. Interlinearations and insertions are indicated with up and down arrows.
John Henderson to Joseph Watson, January 2, 1826

Rocky Spring Mississippi  Jany. 2d. 1826

Sir

I take the liberty to call your attention to the following statement of facts disclosing a most atrocious crime committed in your City.

On the 21st. ult. a man by the name of Ebenezer F. Johnston stopt in this neighbourhood at the house of Mr. John W. Hamilton, he had with him five negroes that he offered for sale, namely three boys and two women, he had also in his wagon the body of a boy that died that day and which was buried in the evening. The following morning one of the boys sated to Mr. Hamilton that he and the other boys were stolen from Philadelphia in the latter part of summer, and that Johnston had whipped him so much that he was then scarcely able to walk and beged of Mr. H to protect him. Mr. Hamilton striped off his cloths and found his body cut in a most cruel maner. He then sent for a justice of the peace for the purpose of having Johnston examined. on the examination Johnston produced a bill of sale for five boys and two women, signed Thomas Collins. he stated that his residence was in Acomack County Virginia, and that he had for some time past followed trading in negroes that last summer he remained at home for the purpose of getting married, that he gave his money to said Collins in company with Joseph Johnston his Brother for the purpose of buying negroes, that they delivered these negroes to him and if they were stolen, his Brother and Collins had deceived him. There being no evidence but that of the negroes, the Magistrate did not think himself justified in commiting Johnston to prison, as by the laws of this State a negroe cannot give testimony against a white person. Johnston appeared to be very much alarmed and perhaps did not know the law; at the request of some one present he agreed to place the negroes in the possession of Mr. Hamilton and let him keep them untill he could procure from Virginia evidence of the correctness of his title He took from Mr. H an obligation to return them when proof was produced—

The oldest boy says his name is Sam, he appears to be fourteen or fifteen years old, Black complexion, says he belongs to David Hill, living in Ammel Township New Jersey about twelve miles from Princeton and twenty from Trenton, he does not know the name of the County. He says

57 "Narrative of Enos Tilghman and others" written on top of letter.
that he ran away from his master, was but a few days in Philadelphia, when a Mulatto man named John Smith met him in the Street and asked him if he would hire to carry watermelons from a boat, that he went to the boat, and that Smith said the watermelons were in a vessel lying out in the river, that he went on board of the vessel that a white man (Joseph Johnston) there drew a dirk threaten to kill him if he made any noise, tied his hands and put Irons on his legs, that one boy was then confined in the vessel and that they afterwards brought in three others in all five boys, that they then sailed to where Joseph Johnston lives, they remained a short time there confined and were again put on board of a vessel with the two women, that they were on the water about a week were then landed and proceeded by land to the State of Alabama, where they remained four weeks, and that Johnston there sold one of the boys named Cornelious, who is about ten years old of light black colour, and can read and write. He also says that Johnston treated them very cruelly, which is evident from their wounds, and that he beat the boy that died very severely about two hours before his death, that he knocked him down with the but end of his wagon whip stamped him and knocked his head against the wagon tire.

The second boy is black appears to be nine or ten years old, says his name is Enos Tilman, that he was bound to a coloured man by the name of Sam Murthry or Murray and followed the trade of Chimney sweep, that he lived in Shiping Street between sixth and seventh Streets, and that his Father's name is Elijah Tilman is a Sailor and sails to New Orleans, that his Mother's name is Hester Tilman. He says that when walking in the street in the night he met the above named Mulatto John Smith who said he would give him a fippeny bit if he would go on board of a vessel and get some oranges that when he went on board he was confined in the maner described by Sam.

The third boy is a Mulattoe appears to be eight or nine years old, slim made, says his name is Alexr. Manly that his mother's name is Amy Manly, that he has a Step Father whose name is John Raymon and that he lives in Bedford Street near Seventh Street; that he was bound to a coloured man by the name of Caleb Carpenter, a mat-maker who lives in Market Street. He appears to be well acquainted with the Streets in your City says he knew Enos Tilman, and Cornelious, (the boy sold in Alabama) there that he went to school to a man by the name of Kimbal that the Mulattoe above named asked him to go on board of the vessel to
get watermelons and then confined him.

One of the women says her name is Mary Fisher that she was born free in Deleware State, that she lived some time in Smyrna and Wilmington, that she was hired near Elkton when she was stolen, that she was in the woods gathering lightwood when two men seised her, put her in a wagon and took her to North Fork near Cannon's Feiry where Joseph Johnston lives, that she remain some time with him afterwards lived with Johnstons sister or sister in law by the name of Patsey Cannon—

She says that the boy who died was black, and about fourteen or fifteen years old, that his name was Joseph and that he said he followed Chimney sweeping and lived in Mary Street Philadelphia—

The other woman acknowledges herself a slave says she was not stolen, believes she was fairly purchased. She was consequently permitted to remain in possession of Johnston—

Johnston says he sold Cornelious, the boy mentioned above, to a man by the name of Paul living in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

No doubt you will give this subject your immediate attention. With the aid of the Officers under your control and the benevolent Individuals of your City I trust you will be able to find the parents and masters of these children. If you find their statement correct would it not be well to publish it, that the coloured people of your City and other places may be guarded against similar outrages? Perhaps before publishing it would be well to endeavour to find the Mulattoe John Smith, and Joseph Johnston and have them arrested. I am sorry that Ebenezar F. Johnston was permitted to go at large as I have not the least doubt of his guilt. I was not present at his examination; the Magistrate before whom he was examined no doubt acted conscientiously Mr. John W. Hamilton is a very humane man and will no doubt take good care of these Children untill claimed by the proper authority—

I will take it as particular favour if you will inform the result of your enquiry. Any other information you may want or any assistance I can give in the business will be promptly rendered. It will be well to remember that any testimony to be offered in this State, must be that of white persons. Not having an opertunity to learn your name, I am compeled to address you by your title.

Very Respectfully yours

John Henderson
Joseph Watson to J. W. Hamilton, February 24, 1826\textsuperscript{58}

[cop]

Mayor's office, Philada. Feby. 24. 1827.

Dear Sir,

I have this moment received your favour of January 27th and hasten to reply to it. I beg you to receive my thanks for the information you have therein given me, and for the humane and noble part you have so promptly taken in the business. I received from Mr. John Henderson of your place, a letter of January 2d. since which I have written to him three times, which communications you have no doubt read. It must afford to both of you sincere pleasure to know that by your generous interference you have snatched these victims from the infamous kidnappers who had them in possession. I shall immediately forward to you and Mr. Henderson, a mass of depositions, and documents, which will instantly turn your suspicions into certainty, as to the infamous thief Johnson and his associates. A grand Jury, enquiring for the City and County of Philadelphia, will sit on the 6th March, before whom a true Bill of Indictment will to a certainty be found against the whole concern mentioned in the letter of Mr. Henderson. After which I shall immediately ask Governor Shultze, to demand Johnson from the Governor of your state, as a fugitive from the justice of ours, and will endeavour to make some speedy arrangement for the return of these Children to their parents and masters.

I pledge myself to you to leave no stone unturned for the eventual apprehension and conviction of this gang of kidnappers. It is owing to the infamous conduct of such scoundrels as these, that the legal claimants of slaves sometimes meet with difficulty in detecting their runaways.— I regret to say that these attempts at kidnapping, notwithstanding the vigilance of the police, are frequently made, and too often with success.—

I have documents and depositions which will be immediately forwarded, that put the cases of Sam, the Jersey boy—Enos Tilghman, Alexander Manlove, and Cornelius Sinclair, at Tuscaloosa beyond a doubt, as to their being kidnapped free citizens of this State, and that they have been kidnapped by John Smith, the mulatto, Thomas Collins, Joseph Johnson, and Abraham E. Johnson, some of these worthies have

\textsuperscript{58} This copy is incorrectly dated. The letter is in answer to John Hamilton's letter to JW of Jan. 27, 1826.
already been convicted for Negro stealing, and publickly whipped in the State of Delaware. I trust from the description you have given of Mary Fisher, and which I shall immediately send to James Rogers Esqr. the Attorney General of Delaware, that I shall soon be able to give you satisfaction on evidence in her case.—

In the case of the murdered sweep boy Joe, I have as yet, but a single link in the chain, but enough however to convince me, that he too was kidnapped. I pray you to hold on to these boys, and to the woman Mary,—every day will make your case stronger, as the proof will continue to accumulate, and justify you in the humane stand you have taken.—

I have the honor to be
Your obedt. sert.
Joseph Watson
Mayor.

Jospeh Watson to J. W. Hamilton and John Henderson, March 10, 1826
[cop]

Mayors office Philadelphia March 10, 1826.

Gentlemen,

I regret that I have not been able until the present moment to forward to you the necessary documents in the case of the kidnapped boys and woman, now in the possession of Mr. Hamilton, taken by him from Ebenezer F. Johnson. I have looked in vain for a sure private conveyance, for if unfortunately lost by mail, the loss of these documents would indeed be serious as well on account of the difficulty of procuring other copies, as of the great labour attending it, but I trust that my former letters have reached you, and that you retain possession of these blacks. Amongst the documents enclosed, you will perceive a true bill of Indictment, found against Joseph Johnson, Thomas Collins, Ebenezer F. Johnson, & John Smith alias Spenser Francis, by the Grand Jury of the

59 Included in the Joseph Watson Papers is a list of documents and abstracts of the papers Watson sent to Hamilton and Henderson. The documents included warrants for the arrest of Joseph Johnson, Thomas Collins, Ebenezer F. Johnson, and John Smith; a bill of indictment against the same; and depositions, letters, and other documents identifying the boys and women kidnapped.
Court of Quarter Sessions, enquiring for the County of Philadelphia,—for conspiracy to kidnap, and for kidnapping them. You will find also an official record from the State of Delaware, distinctly marking the infamous character of the parties to the same effect.—

It is believed that most of the kidnapping that has taken place for ten years past in the middle states, has been perpetrated by these men. A great number of small free coloured children have suddenly disappeared, together with many grown up persons,—in relation to all of whom it is believed from strong circumstances, that this gang has been directly, or indirectly concerned.— I expect in a week or ten days to receive Governour Shulze’s Warrant, for the reclamation of Ebenezer and the other members of the Gang, in case any of them should appear in your State, I trust that what I now enclose will warrant you in arresting and detaining any of them until the demand of our Governour should reach you, claiming them as fugitives from Justice. I know from good authority that Ebenezer F. Johnson, passed through our City with his wife, having arrived at New York, from New Orleans, on his way to, or near, Easton, Maryland, where he resides, and where he arrived about the 4th of February last. I greatly regret that I had not known of his route homeward by sea, I would certainly have shortened his journey. The people of Delaware have heretofore found it almost impossible to apprehend the Johnsons, who are considered as very desperate ruffians, and utterly infamous. The wife of Ebenezer is said to have respectable relatives in Maryland,—and the report now is that he has induced her father to sell off his real Estate, and to move off to Alabama,—and that some of the Gang, Joseph in particular, were expected to accompany them very speedily, but not however before they had kidnapped another Cargo of Blacks. I intend also immediately to demand them through our Governour, from the Governours of Alabama, Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware. It is greatly to be regretted that their progress had not been stopped long ago; they have entailed an infinite deal of misery and distress on a great number of poor people. I would point your attention particularly to the Copy of a letter enclosed for Messrs. T. T. and C. Wright, dated Cannon’s Ferry, Sussex County, Delaware, Feby. 15th. 1826, giving a list of dealers in this way.—

I beg the favour of hearing from you as frequently & as fully as may suit your convenience, in relation to this matter, and if the blacks are restored, as I anticipate they will be, be pleased to point out the best means of getting them home,—if New Orleans is your nearest
Seaport, as I presume it to be, if you will commend these Blacks to the
care of Benjamin Morgan Esqr. Joseph Bennet Eves Esqr. William
Jaredon[?] Esqr. Merchants, they will I know procure them the means of
a passage to Philadelphia, and restore them to their distressed parents and
relatives,—and if such destination should be given them, and you would
enclose this letter together with one from yourself to either of the gentlemen
mentioned at New Orleans, I know it will be an immediate passport to
these poor blacks. I shall also enclose documents to Tuscaloosa, for the
recovery of Cornelius Sinclair. In his case the proof is full, clear and
explicit, but less so in regard to the murdered by Joe, the Chimney sweep,
than the rest.—

I regret that the Chief Justice of New Jersey, Charles Ewing Esqr. did
not affix the seal of his Court to the depositions relative to Sam. I have
endeavoured to supply the deficiency, in the Certificate I have given as
Mayor of this City. I trust however that the Bills of Indictment found
against them for kidnapping in Delaware, and in our State, will operate
of themselves as Clinchers.

I request that the papers and documents, if not required by you, or
such parts of them as may not be required as matters of record, may be
returned to me by some safe conveyance, after you have done with them.
Some of them may be very important on the trial of the kidnappers if I
should succeed in their capture.— I wish the most intelligent boy sent
home quickly in order to give evidence.—

I am with great respect,
Your obedt. Sert.
Joseph Watson,
Mayor.

Joseph Watson to J. W. Hamilton and John Henderson, March 15, 1826
[copy]

Gentlemen,

I herewith enclose to you, three additional depositions relative to the
black woman Mary Fisher. I forwarded to you on the 13th. inst pr. mail,
a mass of documents, and depositions having relation to all the Blacks in your possession taken from Ebenezer F. Johnson, and in the same envelope was a letter dated March 10th. addressed to you, explaining my views and wishes, all of which I hope and trust will go safety to hand. I am exceedingly anxious that the Children should be sent on to us as soon as possible, one of the most intelligent of them at all events, in order to establish of any of the kidnappers, that I may hereafter succeed in taking. I shall very speedily forward to you our Governor's Warrant for the reclamation of any of the Gang that may show themselves in your neighborhood. I have forwarded to Harrisburg a copy of the Grand Jury's presentment, which I forwarded to you,—on which the Governor generally founds his warrants of reclamation for fugitives from justice.

I am Your obedient. Sert.
Joseph Watson,
Mayor.

**John Henderson to Joseph Watson, May 8, 1826**

Rocky Spring  May 8th. 1826

Dear Sir

I wrote to you on the 5th inst. informing you that Mr. Hamilton hesitated about giving up the kidnapped Negroes in his possession. I have now the pleasure to say that he yesterday informed me he had come to the conclusion to give them up without accepting of my offer to indemnify him, saying he never had any fears that Johnston would come here to claim them. He also informed me that business required his immediate attention at Natchez, that he would start for that place tomorrow and take these people with him, and there put them on board of Steam Boat bound for New Orleans, and direct them to the care of Benj. Morgan Esqr. agreeably to your instructions. Mr. Hamilton has all the papers you sent us, and says he will select from among them such as he may think necessary to retain and forward the remainder with the people to Mr. Morgan at New-Orleans for the purpose of being returned to you as you requested.

I received a letter from Mr. Morgan saying you had written to him respecting these people, and that he would cheerfully do any thing in his
power to serve them, that if they should be sent to him he would procure them a passage to Philadelphia.

I have not heard of Johnston or any of ↑the↓ gang since his departure from here after the kidnapped people were taken from ↑him↓ except what you were so obliging as to inform me. Should any of them make their appearance here, I shall use my best endeavours to secure them and attend strictly to your instructions on that subject.

I am very Respectfully
Your Obet. Servt.
John Henderson

Job Brown to Jospeh Watson, July 5, 1826

Woodbury, NJ  July 5th 1826

Sir—Watson  Mayor of the City of Philadelphia

I this day ↑saw↓ published in one of the Philal. papers an act of the Kidnapping of some People of Colour and that divers persons had undergone an examination in your Court also that bills of Indictment were found against John Smith a Yellow Man and three others, White Men. I am also informed by a Coloured Man that there has been in and near this place Since last fall a Coufloured Man by the name of John Smith that he is now and has been for some months past employed by a Farmer near this place but is now as he believes in Philadelphia but expected to return in a few days also says he had frequent Conversation with him and believes that he is the same John Smith named in that publication says that he told him that he had lived in Philadelphia that he could some times make from fifty to an hundred dollars in a Week, now my motive for troubleing you with this is that if you should be of opinion that he is likely to be same person if you will inform me what is necessary to be done I am willing to act in the case being authorized by virtue of the appointment of ↑the↓ Legislator of our State as one of the Justices of the Peace in and for the County of Gloucester.

I remain &c
Job Brown
John Henderson to Joseph Watson, September 6, 1826

Rocky Spring  Septr. 6th, 1826

Dear Sir

I presume that Mary Fisher the kidnapped woman late in the possession of Mr. Hamilton, has ere this reached your City, and informed you of the ill treatment she received previous to her leaving this place. It is very much to be regretted that she did not go on with the boys. I then stated to her the necessity of her appearing to give testimony against the kidnappers, some of whom were expected to be arrested, informed her of a law that prohibits free persons of colour from settling in this State, and used other arguments to induce her to go on at that time, but without effect. She persisted in her determination to remain here, from which I had a right to believe she was well treated. Mr. Hamilton left this place on the 22d. of June for the purpose of visiting his friends in the State of Tennessee; three or four days after he started she came to me to complain of the treatment she received, on the following morning she again came to me, said she had that morning been severely whipped. I went immediately to Mr. Hamilton's Agent to enquire the cause of his punishing her, he said it was for refusing to work. He stated that he was instructed in the event of her becoming dissatisfied to advertise her for hire, and to hire her to the highest bidder until the first of January next; Otherwise if any one would pay the expenses Mr. Hamilton had sustained on her account, to give her up. I replied I would pay whatever charges he might have against her provided he would permit me to send her to Philadelphia, to which he readily agreed. This demand appears the more extraordinary as her services must have been much more useful to Mr. Hamilton than those rendered by her fellow sufferers. I feel great reluctance in making this communication, without an opportunity of seeing Mr. Hamilton. I have delayed thus long writing to you, expecting his return, as he has been looked for at home for several weeks past, he has however not yet returned. I sincerely wish he may be able to make such explanation to you as may be satisfactory. I am well satisfied he did not authorize any one to abuse her, and must presume he intended to make her such compensation at the end of the year as he might believe her entitled to.

I sent her to Mr. Ben. Morgan at New Orleans and received a letter from him dated July 5th, acknowledging her arrival there, and saying he
would procure a passage for her in the the first vessel bound to Philadelphia—

I have the pleasure to acknowledge the receipt of your esteemed favour of 3d. July informing me of the safe arrival of the three boys [O?]. I am very much gratified to learn that you have succeeded in finding the boy sold in Alabama. Having been informed that the man who purchased him is under a bad character, I was fearful he might find means of placing the boy out of reach of his friends.

The Abolition Society of Pennsylvania have sent me a copy of resolutions expressing their thanks to you, to Mr. Hamilton and myself for our exertions in restoring these people to liberty. This testimony of respect, together with that expressed by other benevolent individuals of your City is highly flattering. I feel however that the small share I have had in this affair does not merit such favourable notice. To the conduct of Mr Hamilton in the first instance, and afterwards to your extraordinary exertions in procuring the necessary testimony, they are mainly indebted for their restoration to their friends.

That your efforts in the cause of humanity may always be equally successful is the sincere wish of

Your Friend and
Obt. Servt.
John Henderson

Resolution by Philadelphia Select Council, February 8, 1827

In Select Council, February 8–1827

Whereas information has been received that in the year 1825 several free persons of colour inhabitants of the city of Philadelphia were forcibly seized within its limits by persons unknown and carried off into slavery; and whereas public Justice and the dignity of this city demand that so signal an outrage on the rights of the inhabitants thereof should not remain unpunished, therefore

Resolved by the Select and Common Councils that the Mayor of the City be authorized to issue his proclamation offering in the name and on behalf of the City a reward of five hundred dollars for the discovery and
prosecution to conviction of any person concerned in the forcible abduction of

certain free persons of colour from the City of Philadelphia in the year
1825.

Resolved that the further sum of five hundred dollars be placed at the
disposal of the Mayor for the purpose of meeting the expenses which may
necessarily be incurred in procuring information on the subject of this
outrage upon humanity

Common Council concurred in the above.

Extract from the Minutes
Thomas Bradford Junr
Clerk of Select Council

R. L. Kennon and Joshua Boucher to Joseph Watson, March 23, 1827

Tuscaloosa March 23rd. 1827.

Dear Sir,

having just witnessed the liberation of Cornelius St Clair, by the
decision of the Court, (which has afforded not a little pleasure to many of
the benevolent of this place,) & still feeling it a duty & a pleasure to
engaged in this labour of love, we address you on the case of another Boy
stolen from your City, who is now held in slavery in an adjoining County.
The facts as far as they have come to our knowled are the follows viz. The
boy is now called Charly but says his true name is Jacob Simons—& that
he lived in South Street between the 4. & 5. in April 1825. Was sold by
Bill Lewis to Joseph Lewis who sold him to Joseph Johnson, by whom he
was brot to this state & sold to the man who at present holds him in
slavery— At the time he was kidnaped he was bound to Dr. Russan of
Philadelphia, he is 19 years old in July 1827. He was raised by Jane Hutt
a woman of Colur who taught school for several years in 6 Street between
Lombard & Pine. He is acquainted with J. Pellusgrove & Richard Allen
a Methodist Preacher in Spruce Street. Should you Sir, be able to ascertain
any facts corrobative of this statement, you will be pleased to transmit
them to us at this place as soon as may be. Direct your Communications
to R. L. Kennon Tuscaloosa Alabama. In the close, Sir, we assure ↑you↓
that we shall always take pleasure in doing all we can in accomplishing the
liberation of any persons of colour who may have been kidnaped & sold in this land of slavery. We think it would not be prudent to make known the facts of this case thro any of the public prints for fear he might be sold where nothing would be heard of him.

With high esteem yours
R. L. Kennon
Joshua Boucher

H. V. Somerville to Joseph Watson, April 5, 1827

Baltimore April 5th. 1827.

All the information I have of James Dailey was obtain'd from himself whom I accidentally met on the Banks of the Mississippi while the Steam Boat was wooding [illeg.] which I ascended the river— James appear'd to be in feeble health and gave such prompt and intelligent answers to some questions I made him as to the neighbourhood and its inhabitants that I ask'd him where he liv'd and who was his master— he said he was at the time I saw him staying at the neighbourhood physician's where his master Col. Hicky had sent him for the restoration of his health.— That he had been stolen away from Philada., about 12. or 18 months ago in company with another Boy about 16 years of age nam'd Washington Brown, by a man nam'd or calling himself Pickett— They were taken to Pittsburg and thence down the river to Louisiana where he was sold for life to Col. H. and the boy Brown sold elsewhere in the same State he believes, but he knows not where— He represented his mother As residing in Gallehill Street between Race and Vine North. Lib. Philada.—his mother had married a 2nd. time with a colour'd man nam'd Samuel Morris and that his mother's name was Mary. The Sta[illeg.] [illeg.] of James being well connected and plausible and his showing a considerable knowledge of the city of Phila. I was induc'd [illeg.] to believe his story correct, and therefore took a minute of it in my pocket-book— I drew the attention of several passengers on board the Boat so the Boy's representation of the villainy which had been practis'd on him, all of whom were dispos'd to think his manner and story wore the impress of truth.

I am not personally acquainted with Col. Hicky, but he is a gentleman
of high character and fortune and from reputation I feel no hesitation in saying it will give him pleasure to restore the unfortunate subject of this communication to his family and freedom. Col. Hicky resides on a large sugar Estate about six miles below the village of Baton-Rouge State of Louisiana, and on the left Bank of the river descending.

H V Somerville

H. V. Somerville to Joseph Watson, April 10, 1827

James Dailey & Washington Brown

James, states that his mother has married a second time to a colour'd man nam'd Samuel Morris, and that her name is Mary— They are said to keep house in Gallehill Street between Race and Vine Northern liberties, Philada.— James is a mulatto Boy about fifteen years of age and says that he and Washington Brown were kidnapp'd in Philada. about a year ago since by a White man nam'd Pickett and taken to Louisiana where I saw him.

Mr. Ellicott may probably do much service to humanity by getting some of his friends in Philadelphia to enquire whether such a family may be found as nam'd above, and whether two such Boys disappear'd mysteriously during the past year. I can direct where James may be found if it shd. appear that his story shd. be correct.

H V Somerville

John Henderson to Joseph Watson, December 1, 1827


Dear Sir,

When I last wrote to you I stated that I would write to Duncan S. Walker Esqr. of Natchez and make the enquiry you requested, and that I would communicate to you such information as I might obtain. I accordingly wrote to him but did not receive any answer. I was at Natchez last week
and called on him; he said that after the receipt of my letter he wrote to you on the subject, advising you of the safe arrival of all the documents [O?] he also said that he answered my letter, but it never came to hand. He informed me that none of the kidnapped negroes had recovered their freedom, for want of some white person who could prove that they were entitled to it, documentary evidence alone, not being sufficient for the purpose. Only one of them is in Adams county (of which Natchez is the seat of justice) that nine others that he has heard of live in counties too remote for him to attend to their suits, but he has employed lawyers who will give the requisite attention. Five of them were sold in Lawrence, four in Pike and one in Wayne counties in this State. He also said that he had offered a reward of one hundred dollars for information respecting the others that were brought into the State at the same time, but had not then heard of them— Our Legislature will convene on the first monday of next month, when I shall have an opertunity of seeing the members from Lawrence, Pike, and Wayne counties, and shall not fail to enquire of them if they know anything of the situtation of the unfortunate people who have been sold in these counties. Should I gain any information that I may suppose will in any way benefit them, or be interesting to you I shall inform you of it. You many command my services in any way you may suppose I might be of service in restoring these people to their liberty and their friends. I need not say that the performance of such duty would give me sincere pleasure.

Your obt. Servt.
John Henderson

Poulson's American Daily Advertiser, May 8, 1828

May 7, 1828

The citizens at large will be pleased to know that High Constable Garrigues arrived yesterday from a second journey to Louisiana, where he had been dispatched by the Mayor, for the purpose of attending the trial of some of the black boys that were stolen from this city in 1825, by the infamous Joe Johnson and his agents. It is to be regretted that, notwith-

\[60\] Clipping attached to letter of John Henderson to JW, Jan. 2, 1826, in Watson Papers.
standing the unceasing exertions of Garrigues, after great trouble and expense, he has only succeeded in getting a final discharge for two of the boys, whom he has brought safely home, to wit: Clem. Coxe, and E. Lawrence, and a promise that Sarah Nicholson, a yellow girl, shall be speedily sent home by sea, from New-Orleans. The strongest depositions and proofs, establishing in the clearest manner, the identity of all the missing black people, and their undoubted right to freedom, and of their being stolen away from this city, under circumstances of peculiar cruelty and aggravation, has long since been forwarded to the planters who hold them, with a just hope, and well-grounded expectation that they would be promptly returned to their home and to their friends—or at least that they would be given up to any authorized agent that should be sent for them. But it now appears that this expectation will not be realized; for, after holding these proofs in possession two years, the holders of the absent children now demand strictly legal proof—that is to say, the evidence of white persons in open court, as to their identity and right to freedom, while resident among us. The case of these poor creatures is hard in the extreme: for although dozens of black people whose oaths would here be received in evidence, know them well, and in almost every instance the immediate relatives or parents live within the city or county of Philadelphia, yet it is found to be extremely difficult to find any white persons to identify any of these black children with sufficient precision; & still more difficult to find any such who will agree to travel 1500 or 2000 miles to give such testimony. We hope, however, that the friends of humanity will not lose sight of this matter, and that the remaining ten or twelve free boys who have been stolen away from us, will not be permitted to groan out their lives in bondage, if their holders can be found. We trust this monstrous iniquity will not be quietly passed over. We think that the dignity of our city demands that every one of these free-born people should be restored to the spot from whence they were inhumanly stolen away. And we believe that the citizens of Philadelphia will sustain their councils and their police in continuing their effective exertions for this purpose—and that all reasonable expenses to be incurred would be cheerfully paid by them. Eight of the whole number stolen away have been brought back at different times—but a greater number still remain in slavery.

The State Museum of Pennsylvania

ERIC LEDELL SMITH