

Columbia December

1864.

To his Excellency A.G. Magrath
Governor of So. Carolina
Dear Sir

In the Exemption Act recently passed by the legislature, it is provided in Section No 3 as follows

I beg leave respectfully to ask the attention of your Excellency to the fact that there are, at this moment, between 200 & 300 negroes belonging to myself & to Mrs Keith on the Wateree River at present under the charge of an overseer. These negroes were all brought from the Combahee River, as we were compelled to abandon our lands there in consequence of the proximity of the enemy. Your Excellency doubtless remembers the raid on Combahee.

Our overseer's Exemption (Confederate) expires on the 15th of January & he is preparing to join the Army being about 35 years of age.

As regards myself, a Surgeon's certificate place me, in consequence of fracture of the femur, under detail for providing Government supplies. I have also under my supervision some fifty hands on Government works near Columbia. My attention to these [last names handy?] is indispensable, & renders me altogether unable in connection with the management of another force on the [?] to attend to the negroes on the [?] Your Excellency can well understand what difficulties must be met in the control, & management of all these negroes, driven as we are from our lands, & forced to occupy comparatively unproductive soil & to provide food, clothing, etc. in times like these. Under these circumstances we now have presented to us another embarrassment still more devious & which threatens the total disorganization of these operations. The recent advance of Gen. Sherman has broken up entirely a small gang of negroes which we had left on the Savannah River. We were unable to withdraw them in time & our Dwelling there & other buildings have been fired & destroyed by the enemy & as far as we can learn our negroes are lost to us. On Combahee also, at a plantation higher up the River, we had left another small force of negroes & these too are now either to be lost or brought up here (some 40) to the [?] In short, I have about 450 negroes to look after & the difficulty to which I specifically allude is this—viz that the fact of the relatives of the negroes up here have been captured by Gen. Sherman and it threatens to disorganize the entire mass of them especially as the enemy is every day approaching nearer & nearer. I will not enter further into this view of the case, as your Excellency will comprehend it much better than I can explain it. But in brief, I may

say that I find it impossible to manage 450 negroes without assistance. And in times like these, the influences of an Overseer merely is small & under some circumstances his presence is actually injurious. I, therefore, write in order to petition your Excellency to allow one of my sons to take the place of Policeman for the control of these people. I had 4 sons in the service. My eldest son, Irvine Keith Heyward, volunteered among the earliest, & has been steadily at his post ever since. He is here on sick furlough for a few days only his ailment (fever & ague) being incident to duty on the Allawaba [?] Swamp & the fatigue during the recent movement & actions at the Oconee Bridge in Georgia. It occurs to me that, as his constitution is not strong enough for camp life, & his health impaired by the climate of the low country that he would be a fit subject for the duties of Policeman as had in view by the recent act. It is eminently expedient at this particular moment that the Owner, if possible, would be with his negroes. He alone can influence them in the right way & keep them together. If it be necessary to move them elsewhere out of the path of the enemy—numerous failures on the part of Overseers alone prove that they will follow none but the master. I cannot help thinking, therefore, that in every sense of the word my son would be the proper person. He has never avoided military duty. On the contrary sought it. But the situation of our slaves in this state at the moment is critical & I regard this demoralization & eventual loss as inevitable if they are left as they are the Confederacy threatens to leave us without any one at all to control—a some one worse than useless. I trust, therefore, that your Excellency will recognize our case being Refugees from the Coast as [?] & coming strictly within the intentions of the Act.

I am Sir,
Very Respectfully
Your obe. Serv.
W. Henry Heyward