

*June 15, 1863 - Kidnapping slaves*



Nashville June 15th 1863

To Hon: Andrew Johnson

Military Governor of Tennessee

Dear Sir:



Mr[.] Silas Norris,<sup>Note 1</sup> a Citizen of this County, was arrested a few months Since, on a Charge of "Kidnapping negroes," tried and Condemned to the Military Prison at Alton Ill: there to remain during the present War. At the request of his family and Some of his friends, your attention is respectfully Called to the Consideration of his Case, knowing, that if Consistent with justice and the interests of the Government, you would Cheerfully lend your aid to relieve him from his present unhappy condition—



To learn the charges against Mr[.] Norris I made application to the Police department, for a Copy of the proceedings, and received a reply from Col[.] Truesdail, which I herewith enclose <sup>Note 2</sup>—

Mr. Norris admits that he was employed with some other person, by one Mr. McFerrin<sup>Note 3</sup> to assist in removing his Slaves to the State of Alabama or Georgia.

It has been a matter of Common occurrence, for owners of Slaves to remove them from here to some Southern state, and was not in violation of any law of Ten. How it would be regarded by the Military author[it]ies, I am not prepared to Say. It Certainly, in no Sense, Could be regarded a Crime of So high a grade as "kidnapping". I am assured by Mr[.] Ns friend that if he had known it was against any Civil or Military rule he would not have Consented to act as employee of Mr[.] McFerrin—

As to the allegation of having Sold the negroes or any of them he wholly denies and says the Chare is without any foundation; and not being the owner of any Slave himself he had none to sell. Many of our best Citizens will Cheerfully testify that Mr[.] Norris has always been a quiet, good industrious man, and especially in his domestic relations, as a husband and Father his deportment has been unexceptionable—

His friends feel it their duty, further to say that the family have limited means, and were entirely dependant on his exertions for Support and maintenance.

They confedently Commend his Case to you high Sense of justice and humanity.

With Sentiments of respect,

I have the honor to be Yr Obdt Servt

Tho. T. Smiley.

*Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Vol. 6, pp. 252-253.



**Note 1:** An Edgefield carpenter. He was sent to Alton in January, 1863, and endured there for at least nine months afterwards.

**Note 2:** According to *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Vol. 6, p. 253, n. 3, the copy of the proceedings denounced Norris' crime as "vile, dirty & unholy." The document is not reproduced.



**Note 3:** John B. McFerrin was an ardent secessionist and a Confederate chaplain. He fled Nashville during the great panic of February 1862 and stayed behind Confederate lines eventually ending up in Alabama. Although he apparently wanted his slave property returned to him he insisted he had not tried to have his slaves brought to him or sold. His estate was ruined when he returned to Nashville in May, 1865. See: *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Vol. 6, p. 253, n. 5

