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W. J. Bennett, *Baltimore from Federal Hill, 1831*, detail

Anthony Chase

*enslaved African American
Baltimore, Maryland*

to

Jeremiah Hoffman

Chase's master

Letter

*explaining his
running away*

1827

August 8th, 1827

Sir

I know that you will be astonished and suprised when you becom acquainted with the unexspcted course that I am now about to take, a step that I never had the most distant Idea of takeing, but what can a man do who has his hands bound and his feet fettered He will certainly try to get them loosened by fair and Honorable means and if not so he will ceartainly get them loosened in any way that he may think the most adviseable. I hope Sir that you will not think that I had any faault to find of you or your family no sir I have none and I could of lived with you all the days of my life if my conditions could of been in any way bettered which I intreated with my mistress to do but it was all in vain She would not consent to any thing that would melorate my condition in any shape of measure So I shall go to sea in the first vesel that may ofer an oppertunity and as soon as I can acumulate a sum of money suficent I will Remit it to my mistress to prove to her and to [the] world that I dont mean to be dishonest but wish to pay her every cent that I think my servaces is worth I have served her 11 years faithfully and think it hard that I offered \$5.00 what I was valued at 4 years ago and also to pay 4 per cent until the whole sum was payed which I believe I could of done in 2 years and a half or 3 years at any rate but now as I have to Runaway like a crimnal I will pay her when I can Though I am truly sorry that I must leave you in the situation that I do, but I will Recomend to you as a Servant Samuel Brown that I think a good & honest man and one that is acquainted well with his business but you can Refer to Mrs Snyder who is well acquainted with him and has lived in the hous with him. as my mistress is not in Town I [have] taken the Last months wages to defray my

Chase had been "hired out" to Hoffman by his owner, a common practice among slaveowners.

my mistress:
Susan Williams
of Baltimore, widow of
Henry Lee Williams

*melorate, i.e.,
ameliorate: improve*

Several months earlier Williams had billed her husband's estate for \$356 for Chase's wages, at \$10 per month, for part of 1823, all of 1824 and 1825, and six months of 1826.

[OHW Papers, entry 1195]

Hoffman had given Chase permission to travel to New Castle, Delaware, about sixty miles away, for several days. A week later he wrote a colleague that he had discounted rumors of Chase's escape and therefore had not told Chase's owner of the possibility.

[OHW Papers, entry 1202]



expenses but that money and the five dollars that you lent me the day before I left you I shall certainly Return before I ship for the sea. I dont suppose that I shall ever be forgiven for this act but I hope to find forgiveness in that world that is to com. I dont take this step mearly because I wish to be free but because I want to do justice to myself and to others and also to procure a liveing for a family a thing that my mistress would not let me do though I humbly Requested her to let me do so

Before I was married I was Promised my freedom then after finding this Peace of writeing which you will find incloesed I was then confident that I was free at Mr Williams Death, and so I married I must now beg for your forgiveness and at the same time pray to god for your helth and happyness as well as that of your family

I am Sir your most Obedient Servt &c
Anthony Chase

P.S. People will say that my wife has persuaded me to this but I so declare that she is inocent of any thing of the kind and was always opposed to any thing of the kind. AC.

In his will, Henry Williams (husband of Susan Williams) had arranged for Chase to be freed upon his death. Williams died in late 1826 or early 1827. Why Chase was not freed by Williams's widow is not indicated in the available documents.

See Enclosure, below, in italics.

[OHW Papers, entry 1184]

Enclosure: [Henry Lee Williams. To the executors of his will, ca. 1826]

In consideration of the faithful services of my servant Anthony [Chase] I do hereby authorize the Executors of my last Will and Testament to purchase him from his mistress for the sole purpose of setting him free and I do further authorize my said Executors, as soon as such purchase shall be effected, to execute as the law directs a deed of manumission giving full freedom to the said Anthony.

Later that month, Hoffman wrote Susan Williams apologizing for Chase's escape and for not paying her for Chase's value. (Apparently Williams had written to Hoffman demanding payment.) Even though he did not feel responsible for Chase's actions, Hoffman explained, he enclosed a sum of money to compensate her for her lost property.

[OHW Papers, entry 1203]

Otho Holland Williams Papers [father of Henry Lee Williams], 1744-1839 (MS 908, Part 8/8). Maryland Historical Society