
Document:

Thomas Jefferson Letter and Transcription

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About the Letter

The letter that follows is a rare legal opinion authored at Monticello, written and signed by Thomas Jefferson, regarding the bounty for wolf heads in Augusta and Botetourt counties. In 1771, when the letter was written, Jefferson was a delegate in the House of Burgesses, representing Albemarle County. He had been admitted to the Virginia bar in 1767 after studying at the College of William and Mary. The recipient of the letter was James McDowell, a relative of the Preston who later founded Smithfield in present-day Blacksburg, Virginia. The letter was donated to Historic Smithfield® by Preston descendant Charles D. Fox IV and family.

Transcription of the Letter (front)

By the act of assembly 1748.c.40. a reward of 100 lb of tobo [tobacco] was given for the head of every old wolf, and 50 lb for every young one, to be paid by the county and repaid by the public.

By another act 1764.c.2. the court of Augusta was directed to levy it in money at the rate of 12/6 [12 shillings, six pence] per hundred.

By another act 1769.c.40. Augusta was divided into two counties, to one of which the name of Botetourt was given; yet this did not alter the law as to this matter, but the court of Botetourt may still levy in money for the old reward.

But by an act 1769.c. 23. an additional reward is given of 100 lb tobo for every old wolf and 50 lb for a young one to be paid by the county and not repaid by the public; and no provision is made for levying this in money. The court must therefore levy this in tobo, since the claimant has a right to receive this additional reward in tobo.

Th. Jefferson

Nov. 4. 1771.

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Rec^d of Mr Wm. Bowyer for James McDowell 21/6 for the above opinion.

Th. Jefferson

About the Reverse Side

Two sections of the back of the letter from Jefferson to McDowell indicate that Thomas Jefferson received £1.1.6, or 1 pound, 1 shilling, 6 pence, for the opinion. Although presented somewhat differently, this figure corresponds to the one written by Jefferson on the front page since 21 shillings equal 1 pound, 1 shilling. The back of the letter appears to bear the handwriting of several people, none of whom could be identified.



