

Solitude Letter

Solitude Letter

1860



Title Statement

Solitude LetterSolitude Letter, 1860 Ms.1990.138

Author: John M. Jackson, Archivist

Publication Statement

Publisher: Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Special Collections and University Archives, University Libraries (0434)
560 Drillfield Drive
Newman Library, Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
Business Number: 540-231-6308
specref@vt.edu
URL: <http://spec.lib.vt.edu>



2022 (CC0 1.0)

Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2025-10-09 07:03:28 -0400.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.1990.138

Unit Date

1860

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

Love letter written by L'incounne ("The Unknown") at Solitude (the Preston home in Blacksburg, Virginia) in 1860, and addressed to "Miss Martha."

Extent

0.1 Cubic Feet 1 folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open to research.

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use

The copyright status of this collection is unknown. Copyright restrictions may apply. Contact Special Collections and University Archives for assistance in determining the use of these materials.

Reproduction or digitization of materials for personal or research use can be requested using our reproduction/digitization form: <http://bit.ly/squareproduction>. Reproduction or digitization of materials for publication or exhibit use can be requested using our publication/exhibition form: <http://bit.ly/scuapublication>. Please contact Special Collections and University Archives (specref@vt.edu or 540-231-6308) if you need assistance with forms or to submit a completed form.

Source of Acquisition

The Solitude Letter was acquired by Special Collections and University Archives in 1990.

Processing Information

The processing and description of the Solitude Letter commenced and was completed in September, 2022.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], Solitude Letter, Ms1990-138, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Historical Note

Solitude, located in Blacksburg, Virginia, served as the home of the Preston family in the 1800s. Granville Smith, uncle of Virginia Governor James Patton Preston (1774-1843), named it Solitude around 1808. Sections of the home were built as early as ca. 1802, with an expansion made ca. 1834. The home was again expanded in the 1850s by General Robert Taylor Preston (1809-1880), who had inherited the property from his father, Governor James Patton Preston. In 1872, the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Virginia Tech) Board of Visitors purchased the home and surrounding 250 acres, adding them to the central campus. Robert and his wife Mary lived in Solitude until their deaths in 1880 and 1881, respectively. The building has served in a variety of capacities since then.

Upwards of 250 African and African American people, including the McNorton, Saunders, and Fraction families, were enslaved at Smithfield, an earlier home of the Preston family, and many of them were later enslaved at Solitude. In 2019, Virginia Tech renamed the surviving outbuilding The Fraction Family House at Solitude in honor of the most numerous of the families and in honor of the contributions made by all the enslaved people forced to work on these plantations. The building is believed to have been a dwelling for enslaved people built around 1843.

The writer of the letter in this collection may have been James Patton Preston (1838-1901), the only young, single man listed by the 1860 federal census in the home of Robert T. Preston of Montgomery County, Virginia

Scope and Content

This collection consists of a love letter written at Solitude, the Preston family home in Blacksburg, Virginia, on December 27, 1860. Signed by L'incounnue ("The Unknown"), the letter is addressed to "Miss Martha." In a brief but flowery and somewhat disjointed letter, the correspondent writes of recent, pleasing memories of a "Silven goddess who but a short time Since in unconscious innocency snapped in twain the vital cord which until then vied in freedom with the gentle zephyr which whispers sweet lullabys to the raging mind." The writer concludes with "But to Miss Martha, I can only wish happiness may your joys be numberless as the buds of opning Spring time and if fate should so [illegible] that they should be interrupted by transient sorrows may they be to the joys as the pearly pebbles to the running rivulet barriers to the gliding current but gems of purity to the Sparkling waters."

Keywords

Blacksburg (Va.)
Local/Regional History and Appalachian South
Montgomery County (Va.)
University Archives
Solitude (Blacksburg, Va. : Historic building)

Rights Statement for Archival Description

Rights Statement for Archival Description

The guide to the Solitude Letter by Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, is licensed under a CC0 (<https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/public-domain/cc0/>).

Description of Subordinate Components

Letter

Unit Date 1860

folder 1