

Accounts of Dobbs County First Election and Violence, 31 March–17 July 1788*

Extract of a Letter from Dobbs County, 31 March 1788¹

Extract of a letter from Dobbs county, dated March 31, which by some accident was not received before last week.

“At an election lately held in the county of Dobbs for Delegates to the Convention, the candidates were Richard Caswell, James Glasgow, John Herritage, Benjamin Sheppard and Bryan Whitfield, who were looked upon by the people as federalists; and Abraham Baker, a Baptist preacher, Absalom Price, who occasionally exhorts, Moses Westbrooke, Isaac Croom and Jacob Johnston, (who returned home as soon as he had voted) antifederalists. The abilities of these different gentlemen, proposed as the guardians of the liberties and safety of the nation, I leave to the world to judge of.

About three hundred and seventy persons voted; there are upwards of seven hundred in the county; and it is more than probable that every person of the antifederalist party appeared, for they had been stirred up even from the pulpit (being mostly Baptists) and circular letters had passed from meeting to meeting, and from preacher to preacher. This scheme is said to have originated in the brain of a politician, in the full enjoyment at all times of one or more lucrative offices under this state, and that his most pious friend has been the principal agent.

On Saturday evening, as the tickets were counting out some disorder took place, by which means the lights were struck out, and in the confusion in the dark, the box which contained them was so misplaced that it seems the Sheriff will not be able to make return of any persons being duly elected. It is here remarked, that every person who was in the time of war called tories or luke warm whigs, are now strong antifederalists; and some of them have already the boldness to say aloud let North-Carolina reject the proposed constitution if all other states adopt it; and if she should not be able to stand alone, when she needs succor, no doubt but Great-Britain will assist.”

1. Printed in the New York Daily Advertiser, 30 June.

Martin's North Carolina Gazette, 2 April 1788¹

We hear from Kingston, Dobbs county, that the party who advocate the new constitution, finding that their candidates, amongst whom was General Caswell, the late Governor, stood not the least chance of being elected, blew out the candles, broke the box, scattered the tickets, and mistaking the sheriff, for a methodist preacher, who by his strong opposition to the constitution had almost secured his election, treated him rather roughly.

1. This account of the riot appeared in the no-longer-extant 2 April issue of *Martin's North Carolina Gazette*. The transcription is taken from the *Maryland Journal*, 29 April, the earliest reprinting. This paragraph was the second of three paragraphs concerning North Carolina and the Constitution in this issue of the *Gazette*. For the first and third paragraphs, see *Martin's North Carolina Gazette*, 2 April (RCS:N.C., 202). The second paragraph was reprinted thirteen times by 19 May: Mass. (1), N.Y. (2), N.J. (1), Pa. (6), Md. (1), Va. (1), S.C. (1).

Martin's North Carolina Gazette, 16 April 1788¹

Agreeable to the resolve of the General Assembly, the freemen of the county of Dobbs met at the Court-House in Kingston, on the last Friday and Saturday in March, in order to elect persons to represent them in Convention at Hillsborough, on the third Monday in July next; accordingly Richard Caswell, James Glasgow, John Herritage, Bryan Whitefield and Ben. Sheppard Esqrs. were candidates supposed to be in favour of the Federal Constitution; Jacob Johnston, Morris Westbrook; Isaac Groom, Abraham Baker, and Absalom Price, were Candidates supposed to be opposers of the Federal Constitution. The whole number of voters were three hundred and seventy two; at sunset on Saturday the Poll was closed and the sheriff proceeded to call out the tickets; two hundred and eighty two tickets were called out, the hindmost in number on the Poll of the Antifederalists had one hundred and fifty five votes, the foremost in number of the Federalists had only one hundred and twenty one, and the tickets coming out fast in favour of the Antifederalists, the other party seemed fully convinced they should lose their election and appeared to be much exasperated at the same, especially Col. B. Sheppard, who, with sundry others cast out many aspersions and very degrading and abusive language to the other candidates, which was not returned by any of the candidates, or any person on their part with so much as one provoking word. At length Col. A. Sheppard went upon the bench where the sheriffs, inspectors, and clerks were attending their business, and swore he would beat one of the inspectors who had been peaceably and diligently attending to his business, and having a number of clubs ready prepared, the persons holding the candles were suddenly knocked or pushed down and all the candles in the Court-House were instantly put out; many blows with clubs were heard to pass, (but it being dark they did the most damage to the Federalists.) The Antifederal candidates being unapprized of such a violent assault, and expecting better treatment, from men who would wish to wear the character of gentlemen, were in no posture of defence, and finding their lives in danger, thought it most adviseable to retire privately in the dark, but one of them (to wit.) Isaac Groom was overtaken in the street, by a party of their men consisting of twelve or fifteen—with clubs, who fell on him and much abused him, in so much that he was driven to the necessity of mounting his horse and riding for his life; the sheriff also related that in the time of the riot in the Court House he received a blow by a club and that the ticket box was violently taken away.

1. This account of the riot appeared in the no-longer-extant 16 April issue of *Martin's North Carolina Gazette*. The transcription is taken from the *Virginia Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal*, 30 April, the earliest newspaper reprinting. The report was reprinted in twenty-six newspapers by 7 June: Mass. (3), R.I. (1), Conn. (6), N.Y. (4), Pa. (8), Md. (3), Va. (1).

2. All but one of the reprints changed the "A. Sheppard" to "B. Sheppard."

Sheriff Benjamin Caswell Affidavit, 23 April 1788¹

State of North Carolina. ss.

Personally appeared before me Charles Markland one of the Justices of the Peace for Dobbs County, Benjamin Caswell Sheriff of the said County and being Solemnly sworn, Deposeth and saith That in Pursuance of a Resolution of the General Assembly, in their Session held at Tarborough in December last He notified the Freeholders &

Inhabitants of the said County to Attend at the Courthouse thereof on the last Friday & Saturday in March last to elect and Choose five Representatives duly qualified to sit and Vote in the State Convention agreeably to the said Resolution That He opened the poll on the first day when the election so far as was proceeded on that day was conducted agreeable to the Law for electing Members of the General Assembly that he again Opened the poll & continued the same open until Sunset on the Second day, that during that Time the business was conducted & Submitted to with order & decorum but on Casting up or Counting out the Tickets, three hundred & Seventy two Persons having Voted, Much confusion arose and by the Misconduct of a few individuals, when two hundred & eighty two Votes had been Counted out & Numbered, the lights were extinguished & the Box in which the remaining Tickets were, forcibly & Violently taken from him & Conveyed away so that he was not able to recover the same or is he able to make any regular return to the Convention, as none of the Candidates so far as he proceeded to Count, had a Majority of all the Votes, or had such a Number, but that the remaining Ninety Votes when Counted might have given the Votes in favor of those who were not the highest in poll at the Time the Box was siezed

And further this Deponent saith not
Sworn the 23d day of April Anno Dom. 1788.

Benja Caswell Sheriff

Before
Cs Markland J.P.

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar. Docketed: "Benja. Caswell's aff. respecting Election March 1788:/Referred by the Convention to the Committee on Elections/J Hunt/Presented by Mr. Spaight & Mr Cabarrus/rec'd & referred to the Come. on Elections."

Sheriff Benjamin Caswell: Certification of Election, 23 April 1788¹

[Here appears a poll list of the voting on 28–29 March. See Mfm:N.C. for a facsimile.]

I Benjamin Caswell Sheriff of Dobbs County Do hereby Certify that at the Time and place mentioned in the Caption of the foregoing List I opened the poll & Continued the same agreeably to the Law to which the General Assembly in their Resolution refers, And at Sun set of the Second day the poll was closed after three hundred & Seventy two persons had Voted whose names are mentioned in the foregoing List, That on examining two hundred & eighty two Tickets they appeared to be agreeable to the Marks in the said List; so far as that Number and the Respective Number of Votes given to each Candidate on examination I find to be as follows, That is to say, for

Richd. Caswell 120	James Glasgow 120
Bryan Whitfield 106	Benja Sheppard 118
John Herritage 98	Abraham Baker 154
Moses Westbrook 159	Absalom Price 156
Isaac Croom 157	Jacob Johnston 158

and Sundry other persons a Smaller Number as appears by the said List, that at this Time, to wit, after taking out the 282 Tickets, the Lights were suddenly extinguished & the Box forcibly taken from me in which were the remainder of the Tickets, by some Persons to me unknown, that there remained according to the foregoing Account Ninety Tickets uncounted, so that it was impossible for me to return any of the Number as duly elected,

because there might have been a Sufficient Number in the Box, of the Ninety remaining to have given the Majority in favor of those who had not the highest Number so far as I had proceeded to Count.

I further Certify that the Box in which the Tickets were put was Originally calculated to receive Votes for the Senate & Commons, that there was a division in it and two Sid[e]s; That the Votes on this Occasion had been all carefully put into One side only, During the reception of the Tickets the other side being Sealed up, But that on taking out the Tickets at the instance of some of the Candidates, the other side was opened and the Tickets when taken out & Counted put therein, to examine again to see if any Mistake should have appeared, and this was Occasioned by a dispute at a former Election where the Tickets had been torn in two & thrown away as Counted.

Thus I have stated the true Circumstances of the Case so far as I know or believe and presume the Convention will think me Justifiable in not making any return in the present instance

April 23d 1788.

Benja. Caswell Sheriff

Dobbs County April 23d 1788.

Personally appeared Benjamin Caswell sheriff before me and Made Oath that the foregoing Certificate contains a true State of the facts, of the late Election to the best of his remembrance

Benja. Caswell

Sworn Before.

Cs Markland J.P.

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar. A copy of the poll list was made by Richard Croom.

After the entry for the 282nd vote, an affidavit by Croom was written:

Personally appeared before us two of the Justices of the peace of Dobbs County Richard Croom being of full age, made Oath that he the said Richard Croom Did keep this Book During the Calling out of the Tickets so far as they were Call'd out and that to the best of his knowledge and belief it is a true State of the poll

Rd Croom

Sworn before us this 14th of July 1788

Robt. White J P

Ic Croom J P

New York Packet, 20 May 1788¹

We are authorised to inform our readers, that the account we published on the 16th inst. of a riot in Dobbs County, as taken from a Newbern paper, is calculated to beget false opinions in the public mind, concerning the parties to whom it refers. It should be observed that the State of North-Carolina does not contain less than 56 counties, and that some of those counties are large when compared to Dobbs; whence it will appear probable that the inhabitants of Dobbs are not very numerous. A private quarrel has unhappily subsisted for some time between certain families in that small county, which has been conducted with no small degree of asperity, and has not failed to mix itself with every political or public measure. At a late annual election for members of the General Assembly, this very spirit operated so far as to prevent the return of a member, or to produce a false one, which had the same effect. No person in the State is

now surprized when he hears of such altercations in that county; but the story of a late fracas is so caricatured and misrepresented, as to induce a general belief that disputes respecting the new Constitution have been indecently conducted in North-Carolina, and that some very respectable characters in that State have been attempting to govern by mobs, than which nothing can be less true. The gentlemen who are named as federal candidates in Dobbs, cannot reasonably be charged with a riot that happened after the close of the poll, and after they had chiefly withdrawn, as had most of the voters, from the Court-house. One of those gentlemen² has served the State both as a soldier and a chief magistrate, with so much ability and reputation that he has a claim to protection against the tongue of slander, and the citizens of the State in general have submitted with so much readiness to the government of laws, that they ought to be exempt from the charge of rioters. Though it is generally believed that in the eastern and southern part of the State, or those districts that are near the sea coast, or the post-road, the inhabitants are nearly unanimous in favor of the new Constitution; it is also believed that in the western and northern parts of the State, the inhabitants are considerably divided in their sentiments on this head, whether it is that they are more jealous concerning their liberties, or that they conceive themselves to have a different interest, that they understand the subject better, or that they have not hitherto had proper information, whatever may be the cause of difference in opinion, the conduct of the parties has generally been decent and proper; nor is it true, that the delegates on either side, are generally hampered with instructions. Their constituents, who frequently have not the best means of information, do not think proper to dictate to honest men, whose duty it is to consider the subject fully, and to determine as they may be convinced.

1. Reprinted ten times by 7 June: N.H. (1), Mass. (1), N.Y. (1), N.J. (1), Pa. (6). This account was written by Hugh Williamson. See his letter to John Gray Blount, 21 May (immediately below).

2. A reference to Richard Caswell.

Hugh Williamson to John Gray Blount, New York, 21 May 1788¹

From my Arrival in Philada: which was on the 11th Inst (for I came by Water from Portsmouth) I have been persecuted by a story that had been published in Martins Paper & republished I think in every Paper from NC to this Place. Is it true that North Caroline is toren into factions? Are you generally governed by Mobs? and such other Questions were frequent and familiar. You know that in those Northern States which contain from 10 to 15 Counties each People think differently concerning the magnitude of a County from what we think in Carolina where a quarter Nag might cross a County in half an Hour. General Caswells Name being among the federal Candidates rendered the Story as published by Martin the more exceptionable; the Story was so told as to induce the Belief that the Candidates were all present & had effected a Riot. In this State of Intelligence & being thoroughly chagrined by a Story so obviously calculated to injure a very respectable Character & with him to injure the general Character of the State I thought it my Duty to prepare a Paragraph and cause it to be published which is thought by the Readers to put the Matter in a very different or in a new Point of Light. The inclosed paper contains The Paragraph² which if you think worth while you will forward to Govr: Caswell. As I had no particular Information concerning the circumstances of the Dobbs Riot you may presume that I could not directly and pointedly contradict every assertion of Mr Martin, I was therefore obliged to account for the Riot by reference to

private disputes which otherwise I should have had no desire to mention, but even under this necessity you see that I have taken Care to cast no shade on the Character of any individual. I conceive that I am possessed of some Philosophy & Patience but still I have not patience sufficient to be silent or unconcerned when I conceive that the Character of a friend is injured.

1. RC, Blount Papers, Nc-Ar. Blount (1752–1833) was a merchant and large landowner. He and his brothers William and Thomas owned sawmills, gristmills, and cotton gins. He represented Beaufort County in the state House of Commons, 1782–93, and in the state senate, 1791, 1793, and 1795. He occasionally served on the Council of State. He represented Beaufort County in the state conventions, 1788, 1789, where he supported the Constitution. He moved to the Forks of the Tar River where he helped establish the town of Washington, where he served as postmaster, 1791–1815.

2. See Williamson's paragraph in the *New York Packet*, 20 May 1788 (immediately above this letter).

Petition of Dobbs County Inhabitants to the Hillsborough Convention, 9 July 1788¹

To the Honourable The Convention of the State of No. Carolina at Hillsborough
The Petition of a number of the inhabitants of Dobbs County Humbly sheweth, that
Agreeable to the Resolution of the late Genl. Assembly at Tarborough, a number of Your
Petitioners did assemble on the last Friday and Saturday in March at the Court house in
Kinston in order to Elect Persons to represent Sd. County in Convention When and where
the Election was fairly Open'd and Peaceably conducted until the Votes were so nearly
taken out that there Appear'd not the least Doubt But that Messrs. Jacob Johnson Abram
Baker Moses Westbrook Isaac Croom & Absalom Price would be return'd by a large
Majority of Votes, At which time Sundry Persons that Appear'd not to be reconciled that
the Election should terminate in favor of the above named Gentlemen Seem'd much
Exasperated, and at length (it being dark) Put out the Candles and with Sticks Struck so
Violently Amongst the Croud that Stood Around the Sherriff Inspectors and Clerks that
soon broke up the Election and threw every thing into Confusion, in which time the Box
that contain'd the few remaining Tickets (not Counted out) was taken away and broke up
So that no further Proceedings could be had on the Election, Since which time some few
of the Inhabitants of sd. County (Strongly suspected to have been either the Councillors
or Actors of the before mention'd Riot) have taken upon themselves to Petetion his
Excellency Governor Johnson to Grant them an other Election, In Consequence of which
your Petetioners are now Cited by the Sherriff's Advertisement to another Election on the
14th. & 15th. Instant, Which we are not well convinced of the Legallity of it being
without President [i.e., precedent] under the present Government, We are therefore
Apprehensive that to attend an Election that we are not convinc'd is Strictly Lawful
(calculated Purely to Gratify the Ambitious humour of a few individuals that cannot with
coolness brook the Disappointment met with at the late Genl. Election) wd. be
Unnecessary, We not being willing to enter into a General Riot in the County which we
have the utmost reason to believe would be the case unless the Majority would Calmly
give up to the Menority, We therefore rest our case with your Honourable Body, hoping
upon your Examining the proofs Accompanying this Petetion you will Permit the above
Named Jacob Johnson Abram Baker Moses Westbrook Isaac Croom & Absalom Price to
take their Seats with you in Convention So that their Constituents may have the benefit of
their Assistance

And we as in Duty Bound Shall ever Pray—
July 9th. 1788

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar. The petition has 248 signatures. The document was docketed: "Referred by the Convention to the Committee on Elections. J. Hunt." For a facsimile of the petition, see Mfm:N.C.

Robert White Affidavit, 14 July 1788¹

The State of No Carolina Dobbs County

Personally Appeared before me one of the Justices to keep the peace for said County (Robert White Esqr. formerly Sheriff of Dobbs County for several years), and being duly Sworn on the Holy Evangelist of Almighty God diposeth and sayeth, that in the morning of the thirtieth day of March last being the day Succeeding the Election being Informed that the Election was broke up and the Box broke open and the Remaining Tickets Thrown on the ground at A Certain place near the Jaol this deponant went to the place and saw A part of the Box And near to it A number of Scrolls or Tickets which Appeared to be done up in the Manner they Commonly are when put in the box Curosimy led this deponant to Examine A number of them And on Examining to the Amount of Sixty three of these Scrolls there was sixty two of them had the names of Jacob Johnson Abram Baker Moses Westbrook Absalom Price & Isaac Croom Wrote on them

And further this deponant Sayeth Not

Robt. White

Sworn before me this 14 July 1788—
Ic Croom, J: P

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.

Neal Hopkins Affidavit, 14 July 1788¹

State of No Carolina Dobbs County

Personally Appeared before us two of the Justices of peace sd. County Neal Hopkins who being Sworn upon the holy Avenjelist of almighty God Deposeth and saith that he the said Deponant was one of the Inspectors of the poll at the Election in County aforesaid on the last fryday & Saturday in March last that he attended to the business of an Inspector until the greater part of the Tickets were Cal'd out, when he Conceiv'd himself to be in danger by the threats that were Repeatedly made & to Escape Danger he came of[f] the Bench & made his Escape out at a window & from the uproar he Amediately heard in the coart house he conceiv'd the Election was broke up in a Riot, & he Returned no more to the duty of his office—

And Further this Deponant say'th not—

Neall Hopkins

Sworn before us this 14th of July 1788—

Robt. White J.P.
Ic Croom J.P.

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.

John Hartsfield Affidavit, 14 July 1788¹

State of North Carolina Dobbs County—ss.

Personally appeared before us two of the Justices assigned to keep the peace for said County John Hartsfield Junr. of full age and being duly sworn Deposeth & sayeth that he the said John Hartsfield Junr. did attend the election held for the County aforesd. on the last Saturday in March past; that being the last day of the Election for Deligates to the Convention—that said election appeared to be fairly Conducted in a peaceably manner untill the poll was closed & a number of the Tickets Counted out, that he this Deponant heard a General report that Abram Baker, Moses Westbrook, Jacob Johnston, Isaac Croom, & Absalom Price would be Elected, that he this Deponant was in Court House when all the candles was Instantly put out, & a Great uproar in the House; & further this Deponant sayeth not—

John Hartsfield Junr

Sworn before us this 14th of July 1788

Robt White J:P

Ic Croom J:P

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.

William Croom Affidavit, 14 July 1788¹

State No Carolina Dobbs County

Personally appeared before us two of the Justices of the peace for Dobbs County Wm. Croom of full age and being duely Sworn Deposeth & saith that he the sd. Wm. Croom attended the Election held for the County aforesaid on the last fryday & saturday in March last that the Candidates Supposed to be in favour of Fedl. Constitution were Richd. Caswell Jas. Glasgow Ben. Sheppard Bryan Whitfield & John Heritage Esqrs. that the Candidates Supposed to be Antifederalist were Mosses Westbrok Isaac Croom Abram Baker Jacob Johnston & Absalom Price—The Election appd. to be fairly conducted until the poll was Closed in the Evening of 2nd. day as the Tickets were Counting, upon which Sundry of the Opposite Party appear to be much Exasperated & began to make use of abusive language in Degrading Expressions of the Antifedl. Candidates, & at length When the Tickets Appeared to be Comeing out more & more in favour of the last Mentioned Candidates it did appear to this Deponant there was not the least doubt of the Election of the Antifedl. Candidates when the candles were Suddenly put out & Sundry blows appeared to be Struck with Sticks (it being Dark) at which time there was a great uproar in the Court house, on some persons attempting to bring in another candle it was immediatly Struck out & this Deponant Saw no [use] in a further proceeding upon the Election but heard it Reported that the box that Contained the remr. of the Tickets (not Counted) was gone & further this Deponant saith not

Wm. Croom

Sworn before us this 14th of July 1788

Robt. White

Ic Croom J:P

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.

Fredrick Baker Affidavit, 16 July 1788¹

State of No. Carolina Dobbs County

Personally Appear'd before me one of the Justices for sd. County Fredrick Baker of full age, And being Duely Sworn he Deposeth and Saith that he the Sd. Fredk. Baker did attend the Election held at Kinston for the County of Dobbs on the last Friday and Saturday in March last that the Candidates Supposed to be in favour of the Fedl. Constitution were Richd. Caswell James Glasgow Benja. Sheppard John Herritage & Bryant Whitfield Esqrs. that the Candidates Supposed to be Antifederalists were Moses Westbrook, Isaac Croom Abram Baker Jacob Johnson & Absalom Price that the Election appear'd to be fairly and Peacably Conducted till the Poll was Closed, that this Depona[n]t was Present and held one of the Candles at the Counting of the Tickets, that when the Tickets were chiefly taken out it appear'd to him to be the Genl. Opi[ni]on of those present that the Antifederals would be Elected, that the Federal Candidates from their Expressions Appear'd to be fuly Convinc'd they should lose their Election, that he heard one of them express himself in the following manner POOR DOBBS POOR DOBBS PREACHER BAKER BEFORE GOVERNOR CASWELL, and made use of expressions to the same Purport respecting Some of the other Candidates, that those that Appear'd to him to be friends to the Federal Party Seem'd Generally Exasperated at the Prospect of their Disappointment and Sundry of them Made use of Abusive and Degrading language Mix'd with some threats of Blows to the Antifederal Candidates, at length one that Appear'd to be of their Party went upon the Bench in an Angry Manner and threaten'd to beat Neall Hopkins one of the Inspectors of the Election and About that Instant all the Candles in the Court house were Suddenly put out, this Deponant further Saith he knew the man that Struck the Candle out of his hand and he appear'd to be a great friend to the Federal Party, he this Deponant also says that while it was Dark he heard many blows pass, as he Supposed with Sticks and a great Tumult and uproar there was and he also heard the Sherriff say the ticket Box was gone and this Deponant Continued at and about the Court house for a Considera[b]l[e] time afterward and Saw no further Proceeding on the Election And further this Deponant Saith not

Fredrick Baker

Sworn to July the 16th 1788

Before me J:Coward J:P

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.

Charles Markland, Jr., and Luther Spalding Affidavits, 16 July 1788¹

State of North Carolina Dobbs County—ss.

Personally appeared Charles Markland junr. before me one of the Justices of the Peace for the said County And made Oath That the morning next after the election at Kinston in March last, He was passing by the Goal near which he discovered the Box in peices, that the Tickets at the election had been received that Many of them were Open that others were rolled up, that he took them up or at least as many as he could

conveniently Collect & carried them into Mr. Spaldings Tavern and delivered them to him that as well as this Deponent remembers & believes he Observed to Mr. Spalding that there were more tickets in favor of what were called the Federalists than the others that Mr. Spalding appeared to be Counting them and afterwards Signified to the Deponent that He thought, if the election had been broke up by those of the Federalist party, they were wrong as from these tickets he rather thought the Federalist Candidates would have been elected or words to that effect

Cs Markland jr.

Sworn the 16th. July 1788
Before Jn Herriage

Mr. Luther Spalding also appeared before me and being Solemnly Sworn declares that the foregoing affidavit of Charles Markland junr., so far as it relates to the said Deponent, as far as the deponent recollects or believes is true, to the best of his Knowledge

Luther Spalding

Sworn the 16th. July 1788
Before Jn Herriage J.P.

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar. Docketed: "Cha Markland jr. & Luther Spaldings Affidavits—respecting elections in March 1788. Referred to the Convention to the Committee on Elections *J. Hunt.*/presented by Mr. Cabarrus."

Job Smith Affidavit, 17 July 1788¹

State of No. Carolina Dobbs County

Personally appear'd before me one of the Justices of the Peace for Sd. County Job Smith of full Age, and being Duely Sworn he Deposeth and Saith that he was at the Election that was held at Kinston for the sd County in order to Elect persons to repress. Sd. County in the Convention at Hillsborough, that he was present on Saturday evening at the Counting of the tickets, that it appear'd to him toward the last of calling the tickets out to be the General Opi[ni]on of those that were present that Antifederal Candidates would be Elected (to wit, Moses Westbrook Abram Baker Isaac Croom Jacob Johnson & Absalom Price) at which the Opposite party in General Appear'd to be Very Angry & at length Colo. Abraham Sheppard went upon the Bench in an Angry Manner and made use of Abusive and threatenng Language, that he this Deponant at that time was standing Very near to Fredk. Baker who was holding one of the Candles that the Candle in sd. Bakers hand was well as all the other Candles in the Court house was Suddenly Struck out, that many blows as he Supposed with Sticks was Struck while it was Dark, that he Saw the Sherriff after he Came out of the Court house and heard him Say he had recd. a heavy blow and the Box that Contains the Tickets was gone and he Supposed kick'd or Stamp'd to Pieces, that he saw three Several Candles attempted to be brought into the Court house and were all put out, that after the Riot Ceased he heard Colo. Benja. Sheppard Say Well done Boys Now we'll have a new Election

Job Smith

Sworn to July the 17th 1788
Before J: Coward J:P

1. MS, Papers the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.

Accounts of Dobbs County Violence on 13 April 1788

Woodruff Journal, 26 April 1788 (excerpt)

. . . About three weeks before my Arrival here the Election for Members to the Convention for Dobbs County was held at this place, when the Fœderalists finding that the opposite party were likely to be returned—raised a Mob—broke into the Court House where the Sheriff was casting up the Poll—knocked down every Man that came in their Way—and destroyed all the Tickets that had been given in at the Election—a few Days after a Col. B. Shepherd the ringleader of the above Riot had another Fracas with two Men of the Name of Barfield, who cut him down the Head with an Axe, and fired upon his Nephew who came to his Assistance, and wounded him in both Arms, one of which has since been obliged to be amputated—the Shepherds soon after being reinforced fired upon the Barfields, one of whom was killed and the other dangerously wounded. . . .

1. MS, Woodruff Journal, 1785–1788, p. 133, American Philosophical Society. Robert Woodruff toured several states as clerk to John Anstey, a British claims commissioner investigating Loyalists' claims. The journal was written after the trip was over from notes Woodruff had taken.

Wilmington Centinel, 30 April 1788¹

We learn from Dobb's county, in this state, that on Sunday the 13th inst. a fracas happened between Col. Benjamin Shepard, and Mr. William Barfield, which originated in a dispute relative to the proposed Constitution—the particulars of which are as follow:

Col. Shepard not agreeing in sentiments with Mr. Barfield, with respect to the new Constitution, and while discussing the subject (being irritated with Mr. Barfield) proceeded to chastise him with a whip, which an apprentice boy (of Mr. Barfield's) perceiving, took up a broad ax, and struck Col. Shepard on the cheek, and thereby cut off a side of his face, and broke his collar bone. A nephew of Col. Shepard, who happened to be present, rescued the ax from the youth, upon which he [i.e., the apprentice] took his master's raffle (it being then loaded) and shot at Col. Shepard's nephew, but providentially only wounded him in both arms, one of which has since been amputated. Our informant adds, that Col. Shepard has died of his wounds.

1. This item was first printed in the no-longer-extant 30 April issue of the *Wilmington Centinel*. The transcription is taken from the Charleston *Columbian Herald*, 12 May. Reprinted thirty-seven times by 23 June: Vt. (2), N.H. (2), Mass. (9), R.I. (3), Conn. (6), N.Y. (3), N.J. (1), Pa. (6), Md. (3), Va. (1), S.C. (1).

Wilmington Centinel, 14 May 1788¹

A correspondent, and subscriber to this paper, has sent us for publication, the following particulars of an unfortunate circumstance which lately happened, in North-Carolina; a mention of which was made under the Wilmington head, published in this paper of the 15th ult.

Colonel B. Shepherd, a man of considerable property and great influence in Dobb's county, a few weeks past, paid an evening's visit to one of his neighbours, with whom he had ever lived in the greatest friendship and harmony. Late in the evening, the new proposed constitution became the subject of conversation. Colonel Shepherd, a declared federalist, gave his opinion with freedom, and declared his wish to see it adopted. His neighbour, an anti-federalist, opposed it with much warmth; but finding all his objections readily answered by the Colonel, became very warm and abusive. After receiving several gross insults, Colonel Shepherd, with his hand open, touched him on the cheek, and expressed himself in the following words: "Your language is too abusive to be submitted to; nothing but your age now protects you from that punishment which you should receive." The antifederalist immediately ran out of the house, attended by some of his followers, who all armed themselves with axes—The Colonel, not knowing their design, left the house to return home; it being dark they waylaid him, and with an axe gave him a stroke on the head, which, from its violence, threw him on the ground—the blow was immediately repeated on his breast—One of his friends, who was in the house, hearing his voice, ran out, when he found Col. Shepherd on the ground, almost void of speech, and insensible, the blood running from his nose, mouth, and ears, in considerable quantities. The alarm was immediately given to Col. Shepherd's neighbouring friends, who collected to resent his injury. The antifederal party hearing them approach the house, concealed themselves till they had nearly reached the door, when one of them fired a rifle, and wounded Captain Stephanus Shepherd dangerously in the arm. The federalists, being numerous, overpowered the other party, and with the rifle that had been fired, broke the arm of the antifederalist who fired it, and wounded him severely in several other places. The wounded remained in this situation for many hours; their friends despairing of their recovery—At length a Doctor Leigh, who resides in some part of the state arrived, and by his assiduity and attention, has restored them to perfect health, after amputating Capt. Shepherd's arm. It seems that no reconciliation has yet taken place between the parties.

1. The no-longer-extant 14 May issue of the *Wilmington Centinel* printed this item. The transcription is taken from the Petersburg *Virginia Gazette*, 5 June. The account was reprinted six times by 28 July: R.I. (1), N.Y. (1), Pa. (2), Va. (1), S.C. (1).

Accounts of Dobbs County Second Election, 28 June–16 July 1788

Governor Samuel Johnston to Sheriff Benjamin Caswell of Dobbs County, Edenton, N.C. 28 June 1788¹

State of North Carolina

His Excellency Samuel Johnston Esquire, Governor, Captain General, &>
Commander in Chief of the said State

To the Sheriff of Dobbs County.—Greeting.

Whereas it hath been made appear to me, that the Ballots taken by you at the late General Election for Delegates to the State Convention, were forceably & violently seized and taken from you by some riotous and disorderly persons, so that you had it not in your power to ascertain who were the persons who had the greatest number of Votes, and therefore cannot make a Return of any Persons as duly elected to serve as delegates

in the said Convention: And whereas a number of respectable Inhabitants of the said County have by Petition, represented to me, that the Inhabitants of the said County are desirous that I should appoint another Day for the purpose of electing Delegates to represent them in the said Convention

I do therefore recommend to such of the Inhabitants of Dobbs County aforesaid, as are entitled to vote for Representatives in the house of Commons to meet at the Court House of the said County on the fourteenth & fifteenth days of July next, then and there to elect five Freeholders to represent them in the State Convention to be held at the Town of Hillsborough on the third Monday in July next, and I do hereby require you to give notice to the Inhabitants to meet accordingly, and that you attend at the same time & place and conduct the said Election in the manner prescribed by the Resolve of the last General Assembly held at Tarborough.

Given under my Hand & Seal at Arms at Edenton, this 28th day of June in the twelfth year of the Independence of America, & in the year of our Lord 1788.

Saml Johnston

By his Excellency's Command

Wm. Johnston Dawson P. Sy.—

1. FC, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.

Sheriff Benjamin Caswell: Certification of Election, 16 July 1788¹

State of North Carolina Dobbs County—ss.

In obedience to the Within recommendation of his Excellency the Governor I Benjamin Caswell Sheriff of the County aforesaid did on Receipt of the same, to wit, on or about the second & third days of July instant, Notify the Inhabitants of the County aforesaid by putting up at the Court house and other public places in the said County Advertisements in the usual & Accustomed manner requiring the Freeholders & Freemen in the said County to attend at the Times and Place within mentioned for the Purpose within required And they did then & there Choose and Elect Richard Caswell, James Glasgow, Winston Caswell, Benjamin Sheppard & Nathan Lassiter their Representatives duly Qualified to sit & Vote in the Convention of the State to be held in the Town of Hillsborough on the third Monday in July instant, agreeable to a Resolution of the General Assembly held at Tarborough in December last; and I do hereby return the said Richard Caswell, James Glasgow, Winston Caswell, Benjamin Sheppard & Nathan Lassiter, the Representatives of the said County accordingly

Benja. Caswell Sheriff

July 16th. 1788.

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.

Sheriff Benjamin Caswell: Certification of Second Dobbs County Election, 16 July 1788¹

State of North Carolina.

At an Election held for the County of Dobbs on the 14th. & 15th. days of July 1788. at the Court House thereof for five representatives to sit & vote in Convention at Hillsborough on the third Monday of this Inst. Pursuant to a writ issued by the Governor.

[Here appears a poll list of the voting on 14–15 July. See Mfm:N.C. for a facsimile.]

I Benjamin Caswell sheriff of Dobbs County Certify that at the foregoing Election the Number of Voters were eighty six, that one of the Tickets was a Blank and that the Candidates had the respective Numbers following Viz:

Richd. Caswell	85.
James Glasgow	84.
Winston Caswel	81.
Benja Sheppard	74.
Nathan Lassiter	66.
Bryan Whitfield	16.
John Herritage	16.
Wm Sheppard	2.
Jesse Lassiter	1.

Tot. 425
85 by 5 is 425
July 16th. 1788.

Benja. Caswell Sheriff

1. MS, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar. After the first paragraph, a poll is recorded for the second Dobbs County election with the voters listed in the left-hand column and the nine men who received votes listed across the top in separate columns. The five votes cast by each voter was indicated in the appropriate column of the vote recipients.

*All materials are taken from volumes in the *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution, North Carolina*: Vol. 1, pp. 183–200