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csac.history.wisc.edu > Ratification at a Glance > Pennsylvania > Significant Events and Outcomes Associated with Pennsylvania > The Carlisle Riot and its Aftermath

One of the People *Carlisle Gazette*, 9 January 1788

According to John Jordan, presiding judge of the Court of Common Pleas, who was named as one of the rioters, a single person was the author of “One of the People,” “The Scourge” and of an antifederalist pamphlet to John Nicholson, 26 January. The author of the pamphlet, published in Carlisle in April with the title *The Government of Nature Delineated . . .*, was William Petrikin. Petrikin’s personal letters are eloquent but written without regard for spelling, punctuation, or capitalization. It is evident that his newspaper articles and pamphlet were “edited,” although whoever edited his writing did not tamper with his vigorous style.

Petrikin, an immigrant from Scotland, was a tailor in Carlisle. Evidently he was also a landowner, since the warrant issued for the apprehension of the rioters listed him as a “yeoman.” Petrikin was one of the seven men who refused bail and insisted on staying in jail from 25 February to 1 March when an agreement was reached to request the Supreme Executive Council to drop the prosecution of all the rioters.

AN OLD MAN, who pretends to be an impartial spectator, has taken upon him to furnish the public with a state of the facts, respecting what he calls “the riot on Wednesday the 26th of December last; as also of the burning the effigies of two of the most distinguished characters in the state.” The vein of misrepresentation and falsehood that runs through this production renders its legitimacy very dubious. From its complexion and features it appears to be the brat of some attorney, who durst not father it himself; therefore procured the old sage to act as sponsor. However, as his respectableness has pledged himself for the truth of what is there represented, I shall consider him as the parent, and treat him accordingly. After having pledged himself for the truth of what he represents, he says, “About 5 o’clock on Wednesday afternoon, public notice being given by ringing the bell, etc.” But I would ask his gravity, if a town meeting was called to consult the people, whether they approved of the measure or not? Without this precaution, their public notice was to no purpose. It is unknown to the borough charter, and therefore the intended rejoicers were an unhallowed riotous mob. This impartial spectator has neglected to take notice of a subscription paper that was handed about the same day, binding the subscribers to illuminate their windows, with a menace, that such windows as would not be illuminated should be broken. This was one great cause which induced the people to oppose the rejoicing; and an order of time ought to have been narrated before the ringing of the bell, etc. if the spectator had acted an impartial part; but perhaps the old man was not trusted with the secret;

for tho a very good spy, he may be a bad secretary. A man cannot be expected to possess talents suitable to every sphere of life. It is necessary to observe as we go along, that when it was remonstrated to the intended rejoicers, by a number of respectable inhabitants in the most peaceable manner, that their conduct was contrary to the minds of three-fourths of the inhabitants, and must therefore produce bad consequences if they persisted; their reply was, "They would fire the cannon in spite of any who would oppose them; and if they would not clear the way, they would blow them up in the air." Such imperious language was too grating for the ears of freemen, and produced a short conflict which ended in the total rout of the new Federalists. The old sage further says, "that three gentlemen were appointed to make the necessary arrangements"; in this business they employed a certain John Rinn, and promised him five shillings for his service, but ran away without paying him; to revenge which he collected such of the rabble as the intended rejoicers had gathered together to assist them in hauling the cannon from Mr. Forster's tavern to the courthouse (but deserted them when they were defeated), and with their assistance burnt the sledge and cannon carriage, contrary to the express prohibition of such of the inhabitants who opposed the rejoicing as were then present. This old man says, "The persons met for the purpose of the celebration were altogether unprepared for such an assault, being even without walking canes." True, but they had much more formidable weapons, viz., muskets and fixed bayonets and bludgeons, so that all the preparation they wanted was spirit and courage (Major James A. Wilson excepted) for they had weapons, and numbers more than sufficient. He says again, "that loud huzzas were repeated, with damnation to the 46 members, etc." Here his gravity has pledged himself for a palpable falsehood; for no such words were used as "damnation to the 46 members."

He again adds, "that the friends of government intended on Thursday at 12 o'clock to carry into execution their resolution of rejoicing." Why the old man cannot be serious! What spirit possessed him, when he called them friends to government? Pray what government do they befriend? They are determined enemies to the government of Pennsylvania, to the Confederation of the United States, and to every government that ever existed in the world (a despotism excepted). The government which they are so enthusiastically fond of is as yet an ideal phantom, a chimera, a mere theory detested and execrated by every true friend to government. He again tells us, "he went to the courthouse, found them armed, chiefly with guns and bayonets, that they discovered every pacific disposition, but at the same time, the most determined resolution to repel at the risk of their lives, any attack which might be made on them." What a palpable contradiction is this, "they were armed with guns and bayonets" (he ought to have added, they were loaded with powder and musket ball, as has been proven on oath) "determined to repel all who should oppose them at the risk of their lives, and at the same time to discover every pacific disposition." I appeal to common sense, if they could possibly have discovered a more hostile disposition; however their disposition appeared more pacific upon hearing the militia drum beat. They immediately left the ground, after firing three discharges of cannon; whereas their original declaration was, that if the devil should come from hell to oppose them, they would fire thirteen. Our old man again says, "although the mob made their appearance in several places and used threatening language which was treated with every possible contempt, and no violence offered to them." Was it not violence to draw a sword, and present a loaded gun and fixed bayonet at

an unarmed man, for no other reason, than treating them with a little irony, which it was difficult for any person of a moderate share of vivacity to forbear on this occasion; for the whole transaction had every appearance of a funeral ceremony awkwardly performed, but not the least resemblance of rejoicing. He further tells us, "there are prosecutions about to be commenced in the name of the state, against the persons whom he is pleased to call rioters." 'Tis very well to be prepared, but would advise, that the prosecutions be deferred, until the new Federal Constitution is adopted, where they may have a trial at a federal court, without the detestable interference of a jury. He says again, "that every lover of good order must lament the wound, the dignity of the state has received, in burning etc. the effigy of the first magistrate of the commonwealth." This is the first time I heard of this transaction, I presume it owes its origin to the inventive genius of the old man; for my part I took His Excellency Doctor Franklin to be the first magistrate of the commonwealth; and I never so much as heard a reproachful word spoke of him. But perhaps he meant the Chief Justice, to whom no indignity was offered in his judicial character, but his conduct in the late Convention has given the State a much greater wound, and justly merits the resentment of the People. The old man observes, "it is remarkable that some of the most active people in the riot of Wednesday and the mob of Thursday have come to this country, within these two years, men perfectly unknown and whose characters were too obscure to attract the notice of the inhabitants of this place." Some of these characters, however, are so obvious as to be noticed with an envious eye, even by the old man himself, and several others of his party, but does the old man think newcomers are to be deprived of their rights as men? But in this his spirit is exactly similar to that of their darling Constitution, which has laid newcomers under many legal disabilities and given all the discouragement that it durst safely do, by empowering Congress to lay a tax of ten dollars on each immigrant.

The old man talks of some who opposed the rejoicing, that had but lately stripped off the garb of British soldiers; here he is mistaken again, but I suppose he means the wheelbarrow garb which Rinn, their artillery man, had so lately been stripped of. He again exclaims, "proceedings of this kind are really alarming, and directly tend to the dissolution of all government." Now of all others, the new Federalists ought to be silent about the dissolution of governments, for they professedly avow the dissolution of all governments, and is endeavoring to establish an unheard of monster on their ruins. He tells us further "that being an old man, he was invited to spend the evening with the Federalists (or rather incendiaries) at Mr. Joseph Postlethwait's tavern."

What! has our impartial spectator degenerated into a palpable partisan, by his own confession at the banquet of wine? However he might have saved himself the trouble of the declaration, as any person who reads his narrative would have easily discerned his cloven foot without the help of spectacles; but it seems he was invited, indeed, it would have been the basest ingratitude of the new Federalists, if they had not invited their faithful spy, who had watched the motions of their opposers with such unwearied assiduity, that day and the preceding evening. I would recommend thus much to the old gentleman (if it is not profanity to call him so) should his vanity prompt him to father another bastard of this kind, to beware of inserting such palpable falsehoods, for mankind has not as yet refined so much upon good breeding as to pass them by unnoticed, out of deference to his antiquated genius. I shall therefore dismiss his gravity, with an old proverb, "old people are twice children."

(a) One of them [James Wilson] is peculiarly distinguished for his cowardice and timidity in the day of trial, for his opposition to the independence of America; and for inventing every possible scheme to destroy the liberty of her citizens.

1. “Wheelbarrow garb” was worn by prisoners released from jail to work on public improvements and who used wheelbarrows. Prisoners accused of more serious crimes wore a ball and chain in addition, and were chained to the barrows.

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