



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

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

Another of the People *Carlisle Gazette*, 16 January 1788

The base untruths, the infamous falsehoods contained in the publication under the signature of One of the People, require a refutation, which would be unnecessary were the characters of the authors known to the public. A decent, a candid, and true representation of the conduct of the rabble, who interrupted the rejoicing Wednesday the 26th December, and burned the effigies on Thursday, was given to the public, and the authority of it depended not on the respectability of the writer, but on a proof of the facts; and those who doubted those facts were referred to depositions in the hands of John Agnew, Esquire. It depended then, not on an anonymous publication, but on testimony. The names of the authors were left with the printers. It was not the work of an attorney, nor the production of needy, obscure, and starving adventurers, whose precarious freedom depends on the nod of their numerous creditors, nor of a man who lives in the violation of every divine precept, and every moral duty, nor of one who has basely deserted a constitution which he approved by an uplifted hand in a town meeting, and who under the smile of complacency and benevolence conceals a black and most treacherous heart; and under the specious mantle of religion covers a depraved mind and the most detestable hypocrisy. It never was fathered by him, whom they basely attempt to calumniate under the appellation of an old spy. A man who despises their impotent efforts to injure him, equally as he does their persons or characters, and whose unblemished character I would no more place in competition with that of his calumniators than I would put virtue in competition with vice, honesty with dishonesty, integrity with knavery, or truth with falsehood. A contest with them I know is as if a well-dressed man were to engage with a chimney sweep in a wrestling bout, where if he threw the sweep, soot and dirt are the only consequences of the victory. It seems a matter of surprise to One of the People, that a town meeting was not called agreeable to the charter. I never knew that the charter prescribed a mode of rejoicing, or that it was necessary to have a meeting of the borough, and ask their permission to be pleased, and for liberty to express their pleasure. I now proceed to state the falsehoods contained in the publication of One of the People. The first assertion is the most abominable falsehood that ever polluted paper; it is asserted that a subscription paper was handed about, binding the subscribers to illuminate, containing a menace that such windows as were not illuminated should be broken. To whom was this subscription paper handed? Who saw it? This is a tale fabricated to excuse their wicked, abandoned, and unprovoked attack—to catch the country whom they have through the whole of this transaction endeavored to delude and inflame, by the grossest misrepresentation and matchless untruths. A subscription paper did not exist. They say the intended rejoicers were remonstrated to by a number of respectable

inhabitants; here are two falsehoods in as many lines. I dare declare to the public, that they are not amongst the respectable inhabitants of Carlisle, and that they are men equally void of credit, character, and understanding; that they came up in a most tumultuous, daring, and insolent manner, armed with bludgeons, and their only remonstrances were desperate threats, their only arguments oaken cudgels. [John] Rinn, lately released from his chains at the wheelbarrow, it is asserted was hired to assist the party who attempted to rejoice, and from revenge, as they had run off without paying him, had gathered the rabble, burned the carriage of the cannon, and placed the cannon in the flames. Do not act so ungratefully by your best friend as to give him up; his valiant and faithful services in your cause deserve a better return, for his worthy keeper instilled your glorious principles into his patriotic breast. He caught a spark of that sacred fire of liberty, which, when it explodes, destroys promiscuously its friends and enemies; and when the Constitution was burned, he declared that he never would part with his dear-bought liberty. But then to disown your guide and general, for shame! for shame! Do not add the crime of ingratitude to that of lying, for if you thus desert him, _____ and _____ and must be left out of the catalogue of your adherents. When you say that Rinn collected the rabble and burnt the carriage of the cannon, if you mean yourselves, I readily subscribe to it; for when you were collected, you contained the body of the rabble of this place. That Rinn was one of the blessed freemen and respectable inhabitants who remonstrated with clubs, burnt the carriage, and put in the flames the cannon is an indubitable truth. It is a fact in testimony, that one of their party spiked the cannon, and this was justified by their declaration that the cannon was the property of the United States, that what belonged to the United States belonged to the People; that they were the People, and had consequently a right to burn the carriage and spike the cannon; that is, the vile rabble of Carlisle had a right to destroy the public property, or convert it to their own use, as was done in this instance with some of the iron of the cannon. It is said that the people who came to rejoice were armed with muskets, bayonets, and bludgeons; this like the rest of their assertions is totally false, for at the time of their rout they had neither musket, bayonet, nor bludgeon. After their rout, indeed, one person returned with a musket and bayonet and kept the whole mob at bay. Here comes the strangest of all assertions, that the Federalists had numbers more than sufficient, if they had but resolution to have repelled their attack. The writer who has made use of one proverb should have recollected another, "That liars should have good memories." He should have recollected, that a little above he had said, "that the opponents to the rejoicing, were three-fourths of the inhabitants." Truth is consistent; it appears strange that this inconsistency should have remained uncorrected; one might have expected it from the pens of its vile and contemptible composers.

But when it came forth from the wise, the learned, and the venerable committee met in secret conclave at the Lamb, better things were to have been looked for. The charge of want of courage in the Federalists, one would be led to imagine that their adversaries possessed that virtue in a high degree. Yes, their conduct on that glorious field gives them a claim to some pretensions. It certainly was a bold heroic and glorious achievement for twenty men armed with bludgeons to beat down one unarmed man. Ye, worthy captains who headed the victorious band, after the toils of that ever-memorable day, you may repose yourselves in peace, in quiet, lay aside the bloody acts of war, and suffer your well-tried swords to rest in their peaceful scabbards. Believe me noble sirs, it was an exploit worthy your martial genius, and that posterity will mention with

applause and veneration your names, when those of Alexander and Caesar shall be forgotten. But this man of the people advances to Thursday, he denies that the Federalists are friends to government; if a submission to the laws and support of civil authority constitute a friend to government, then they are the friends to government; but if a declaration that if the laws are executed, the jail will be pulled down and the town reduced to ashes constitute a real friend to government, then most certainly their adversaries are entitled to that honorable appellation.

It is admitted by the Federalists that they did assemble at the public square; that they were armed with muskets and bayonets; that they had balls in their pockets and cartouches; that there were several discharges of the cannon and firings of musketry; and I can assure the world that they were not prevented by fear, from firing the cannon thirteen times. They gave but a discharge for each of those states who had acceded to Constitution; they remained on the ground two hours; it was some time before they could unspike the gun. The ratification was read—every countenance beamed with joy, gladness, and happiness, except those of a few worthless ragamuffins, who were made drunk for the purpose of burning the effigies. The contempt displayed by the men under arms must have grated their leaders. One cub insulted a young gentleman and provoked him so far as to lay his hand on his sword, but he immediately staggered off. This is the man of vivacity, who treated them with a little irony—he is certainly a young man of great vivacity, but his natural vivacity, on this occasion, must have been increased by the artificial vivacity of New England rum. The drum of the mob had not beat until the Federalists left the ground. One of the captains had not slept off his night's drunkenness; the other was unfit to appear, as he had provoked a Federalist to bung his eyes on Wednesday evening. The vapor about the beating of the drum resembles the declaration of one of the partisans when the cannon was in the fire, "Damn the cannon, if I was not afraid of breaking my stick, O how I could beat it." One of the People says, that a pacific disposition and determined resolution are palpable contradictions. I think not. A man might possess a very pacific disposition, and at the same time take his life, if he attempted to burn his house, to rob, or to assassinate him. The whole transaction, they say, had the appearance of a funeral ceremony. If they allude to the rejoicing, it is false, if to a meeting of a knot of their demagogues at a spunging house upon the first intelligence of ratification, it may be true, for they held down their disappointed and disconsolate heads and mourned with bitterness, the ruin, the destruction of that anarchy and confusion, which raised them to any kind of consequence; they lamented the loss of their beloved popularity, and shed tears at sinking again into that state of insignificance and contempt, which nature intended they should occupy. This sagacious writer denies that the Chief Justice is the first magistrate of the state; the person from whom he received this information must have derived his law knowledge from being some bum bailiff, or perhaps have disgraced the more dignified office of a justice of the peace. But let me inform him, that the Chief Justice is the first judicial magistrate in the state, and the vile subterfuge of burning him, not as Chief Justice, but as a member of the Convention, will not serve their turn. The label affixed to his breast was in these words, "THOMAS M'KEAN, Chief Justice," and their conduct is approved by the authors of their contemptible and scurrilous justification; for they have the audacity to declare, that his conduct in the Convention has given the state a greater wound—a greater wound than he has given the state in his judicial character is the obvious meaning; and that he surely merits the resentment of the people, that is, the mob have done right in burning his effigy. But it seemed the old man looked with

an envious eye, upon the rising consequence and dignity of the newcomers (some of the newcomers are respectable characters, and reprobate the conduct of their apostate countrymen); poor old man, he must be envious indeed! What qualities and possessions he envies them for, I wish the public had been informed. He would scarcely wish to barter respect for contempt; good report for infamy; an unembarrassed situation for poverty. Old as he is, he is not reduced to that state of dotage. There is some reason in their opposition to the proviso in the Constitution, which requires a residence of fourteen years, as a qualification for the President of the United States. Had the Federal Convention known, that in Carlisle there lived persons who possessed the understanding and abilities of a Solon or a Lycurgus, a Montesquieu or an Adams, they would, unless they had beheld them with the envious eye of the old man, have made a reservation for those enlightened men, who have since the Revolution honored America with their habitations, and chosen Carlisle as the spot on which to commence their political career. If the representation of the 9th of January was true, then those people may be under no apprehension from a prosecution, but if it contained not one syllable of truth, then they may justly tremble! So conscious of the latter being the case were their four counselors (perhaps secret instigators) that they, with the most anxious solicitude, pressed the justice [John Agnew] before whom the depositions were taken to destroy them and bury the whole transaction in oblivion; and accompanied their request with a menace, that if this was not done, Carlisle might be laid in ashes. Had this the appearance of that innocence which they now proclaim to the world [---] [---] [---] [---] the terror of guilt, and dread of punishment; this insidious proposition was spurned at with contempt by the upright magistrate. They have now fled to stubborn impudence, and infamous, unhallowed falsehoods as the last presage of guilt. The threat in the concluding paragraph is most despicable. They know or might have known the authors by applying to the printers. The reputation of the authors is safe, for their account contained nothing but the truth, and as for any other safety they are not very solicitous. The public are requested to lend an ear to a publication, every line of which contains an untruth; but if a doubt of the truth of the first account remains in their mind, to remove the doubt by a candid inquiry, by reading the depositions in the hands of John Angew, Esquire, who will readily grant them that permission.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. II: Pennsylvania (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1976), 679–84.