

"Fearful and Exciting Intelligence - The General Newspaper Despatches,"

New York (NY) *Herald*, October 18, 1859

<https://stampedes.dickinson.edu/document/new-york-ny-herald-fearful-and-exciting-intelligence-general-newspaper-despatches-october>

FEARFUL AND EXCITING INTELLIGENCE.

NEGRO INSURRECTION AT HARPER'S FERRY.

Extensive Negro Conspiracy in Virginia and Maryland.

Seizure of the United States Arsenal by the Insurrectionists.

Arms Taken and Sent into the Interior.

The Bridge Fortified and Defended by Cannon.

Trains Fired into and Stopped---Several Persons Killed---Telegraph Wires Cut---Contributions Levied on the Citizens.

Troops Despatched Against the Insurgents from Washington and Baltimore,

&c., &c., &c.

SPECIAL DESPATCHES TO THE HERALD.

A telegraph despatch has just been received by the Secretary of War from Mr. Garrett, President of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, stating that a serious affair has occurred at Harper's Ferry, where the United States Armory and the bridge are in possession of a large band of armed men, said to be abolitionists, but thought to be Armory men. The guns from the Armory have been taken for offensive use, and the leaders notified our men that no trains shall pass the Armory and Bridge. Our officers were fired upon, and a laborer nearly killed. The wires being cut, we got our advices from the next station. He asks the Secretary of War to get the government to allow the military of Washington and Baltimore to go on in the three o'clock train this afternoon, and render them such assistance as may be necessary. The Cabinet are now in session upon the matter.

The government immediately ordered that a company of marines from Washington barracks should leave this afternoon, under the command of Colonel Harris, for Harper's Ferry, and if necessary any further assistance that may be required.

Colonel Robert Lee, of the army, will command the United States forces. He leaves in the afternoon train with a company of marines, and will be joined on the Ohio Railroad by a company of volunteers from Maryland. Troops have been ordered from Old Point.

WASHINGTON, Oct. 17, 1859.

A passenger who has just arrived here, who left Harper's Ferry this morning, having been detained there for upwards of five hours, corroborates the statements received to-day by the Secretary of War.

This gentleman, who is an intelligent man, states that a negro insurrection of a formidable character, headed by white men, is in active operation. They are fully armed with muskets and other arms, which they had seized at the Armory. They had, when the train left, taken all of the white citizens, so my informant says, and held them as prisoners. They number one hundred and fifty, and recruits were coming in constantly from the surrounding country.

My informant says that they told him that they would have, by one o'clock to-day, over seven hundred negroes and white men. The object of this movement was to obtain their freedom.

They had cut off all the avenues of communication with the town, and refused to let any leave the place. They allowed the train that my informant was in to pass, after a detention of five hours, giving the conductor only five minutes to decide; if not, they would seize them and lock them up in the Armory. He says they barely escaped with their lives.

The Secretary of War received some time since an anonymous letter, stating that a foray would be made by negroes, headed by white men, upon Harper's Ferry, Wheeling, and other points in Virginia, about the middle of October. At the time he thought nothing of it, and gave it no attention whatever; but it looks from this movement as though they have been organizing for some time, and intended to carry it out.

Slave Stampedes on the Southern Borderlands

National Park Service Network to Freedom / House Divided Project at Dickinson College

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THE GENERAL NEWSPAPER DESPATCHES.

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17, 1859.

A despatch just received here from Frederick, and dated this morning, states that an insurrection had broken out at Harper's Ferry, where an armed band of abolitionists have full possession of the government arsenal. The express train going east was twice fired into, and one of the railroad hands and a negro killed, while they were endeavoring to get the train through the town. The insurrectionists stopped and arrested two men who had come to town with a load of wheat, and seizing their wagon, loaded it with rifles, and sent them into Maryland. The insurrectionists number about two hundred and fifty whites, and are aided by a gang of negroes. At last accounts fighting was going on.

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17—1 P. M.

It is apprehended that the affair at Harper's Ferry is more serious than our citizens seem willing to believe. The wires from Harper's Ferry are cut, and consequently we have no telegraphic communication beyond Monocacy Station. The Southern train which was here at an early hour this morning has not yet arrived. It is rumored there is a stampede of negroes from this State. There are many other wild rumors, but nothing authentic as yet.

The above is given just as it was received here. It seems very improbable, and should be received with great caution, until confirmed by further advices.

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17—2 P. M.

Another account, received by train, says the bridge across the Potomac was filled with insurgents, all armed. Every light in the town was extinguished, and the hotels closed. All the streets were in possession of the mob, and every road and lane leading thence to be barricaded and guarded. Men were seen in every quarter, with muskets and bayonets, who arrested the citizens, and pressed them into the service, including many

negroes. This done, the United States Arsenal and Government Pay House, in which was said to be a large amount of money, and all the other public works, were seized by the mob.

Some were of the opinion that the object was entirely to plunder and to rob the government of the funds deposited on Saturday at the Pay House. During the night the mob made a demand on the Wager Hotel for provisions, and enforced the claim by a body of armed men.

The citizens were in a terrible state of alarm, the insurgents having threatened to burn the town.

The following has just been received from Monocacy, this side of Harper's Ferry:—"The mail agent on the Western bound train has returned to Monocacy, and reports that the train was unable to get through. The town is in possession of the negroes, who arrest every one they can catch and imprison. The train due here at 3 P. M. could not get through, and the agent came down on an empty engine."

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17.—2:30 P. M.

The western train on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad has just arrived here. Its officers confirm the statements first received touching the disturbance at Harper's Ferry. Their statement is to the effect that the bridge-keeper at Harper's Ferry, perceiving that his lights had been extinguished, went to ascertain the cause, when he was pursued and fired upon by a gang of black and whites. Subsequently the train came along, when a colored man, who acted as assistant to the baggage master, was shot, receiving a mortal wound, and the conductor, Mr. Phelps, was threatened with violence if he attempted to proceed with the train. Feeling uncertain as to the condition of affairs, the conductor waited until after daylight before he ventured to proceed, having delayed the train six hours.

Mr. Phelps says the insurrectionists number two hundred blacks and whites, and that they have full possession of the United States armory. The party is commanded or led by a man named Anderson, who had lately arrived at Harper's Ferry. Mr. Phelps also confirms the statement in a previous

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despatch, that the insurrectionists had seized a wagon, and loading it with muskets, had despatched it into Maryland. The military of Frederick had been ordered out.

Despatches have been received from President Buchanan, ordering out the United States troops at this point, and a special train is now being got ready to convey them to the scene of disturbance. He has also accepted the volunteered services of Captain Senick's Company, of Frederick, and has likewise ordered the government troops from Old Point Comfort to proceed immediately to Harper's Ferry. This intelligence is authentic.

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17—3:30 P. M.

The mail train going West, got as far as Sandy, when Mr. Hood, the baggage master and another party started on foot to the bridge. They went through the bridge, and were taken and imprisoned, but subsequently went before the captain of the insurrectionists, who refused to let anything pass.

All of the eastward bound trains lying west of Harper's Ferry, have been taken, persons from this side the river tying them together and taking off the slaves. The mail train bound west has returned to Monocacy. There are from five hundred to seven hundred whites and blacks concerned in the insurrection.

The United States marines at Washington are under orders for Harper's Ferry. There is great excitement in Baltimore, and the military are moving; several companies are in readiness to take the train, which will leave soon.

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17—4 P. M.

An account from Frederick says a letter has been received there from a merchant at Harper's Ferry, sent by a boy, who had to cross the mountain and swim the river, which says that all the principal citizens are imprisoned, and many have been killed; also that the Railroad agent had been shot twice, and that the watchman at the depot had been shot dead.

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17—5 P. M.

A train filled with military, including the Law Greys, City Guards, Shield's Guard, and other companies, left here at four o'clock for Harper's Ferry. Representatives of the press accompanied the military.

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17—7 P. M.

Despatches from Martinsburg, west of Harper's Ferry, received via Wheeling and Pittsburg, confirms the report of the insurrectionists having possession of the arsenal at Harper's Ferry, and says they have planted cannon at the bridge. All the trains have been stopped. A body of armed men was getting ready to proceed thither to clear the road. There was great excitement at Martinsburg, Va.

There is great excitement here. Company F, with full ranks has just left the armory, expecting to take a special train to-night. This is a new company with a similar uniform to the Greys.

The Greys leave for Harper's Ferry early in the morning.

The Governor left to-night for Washington.

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17—9 P. M.

The *American's* special reporter telegraphs from Plane No. 4, 45 miles from Baltimore and 31 from Harper's Ferry, at 8 o'clock, that the train consists of 17 cars with 400 troops, under Major Reynolds, with a roadmaster and laborers to repair the track and telegraphers to mend the line. Three companies from Frederick were in an advance train. Col. Harris, of the United States marines, commanding the expedition, follows in a special train. They will not reach Harper's Ferry before 10 o'clock.

WASHINGTON, Oct. 17—4 P. M.

On the receipt of the intelligence from Harper's Ferry, orders were issued for three companies of artillery at Old Point, and the corps of marines at the Washington Barracks, to proceed thither without delay. The marines, ninety-three in number, left in the 3:15 afternoon train, with two twelve pound howitzers and a full supply of ammunition.

It is reported that they are under orders to force the bridge to-night at all hazards. Colonel Faulkner accompanies them.

It is reported on good authority that some weeks ago Secretary Floyd received an anonymous epistle stating that about the 15th of October the abolitionists and negroes, and other disaffected persons, would make an attempt to seize the arsenal and hold the place, but the statement was so indefinite

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and improbable as to cause no fears of such an outbreak.

WASHINGTON, Oct. 17—9 P. M.

In view of the possibility of the disturbances at Harper's Ferry extending to this vicinity, the Mayors of Washington and Alexandria have taken precautionary steps for its suppression. The President, through the Mayor of Washington, ordered a strong detachment of volunteer militia to be posted at the national and company armories, which was promptly done. Two hundred stand of muskets and a supply of ammunition were also placed in the City Hall for emergency.

It is suggested by well informed persons that the cause of the insurrection is the reported fact that not long since the contractor for the construction of a government dam at the ferry absconded, largely indebted to several hundred employers, who have taken this step to indemnify themselves by the seizure of the government funds, which it was supposed were transported thither on Saturday. A gentleman just in from Harper's Ferry thinks the blacks participated in the outbreak only on compulsion.

RICHMOND, Oct. 17, 1859.

It is reported and believed that the Governor of Virginia has ordered volunteer troops to Harper's Ferry.

MONOCACY BRIDGE, Oct. 17—10 P. M.

The train arrived here at nine o'clock. Luther Simpson, baggage master, of the mail train, gives the following particulars:—I walked up the bridge, was stopped, but was afterwards permitted to go up and see the captain of the insurrectionists. I was taken to the armory, and saw the captain, whose name is Bill Smith. I was kept prisoner more than an hour, and saw from five hundred to six hundred negroes all having arms; there were two or three hundred white men with them; all the houses were closed. I went into a tavern kept by Mr. Chambers, thirty of the inhabitants were collected there with arms, they said most of the inhabitants had left, but they declined, preferring to protect themselves. It was reported that five or six persons had been shot.

Mr. Simpson was escorted back over the bridge by six negroes.

The train with the Frederick military is lying at Point of Rocks. A train with the directors of the Pennsylvania Railroad on board is on the other side of Harper's Ferry. It was believed that the insurrectionists would leave as soon as it became dark.

Orders have been received here that the train shall stop at Sandy Hook until Col. Lee, who is following in a special train, arrives.

There are any amount of rumors, but nothing certain.

MONOCACY, Oct. 18—1 A. M.

The special train, with Colonel Lee's command, passed this station at 11:30 P. M. It is supposed that there is difficulty in adjusting the breaks in the road this side of Harper's Ferry, as nothing has since been heard of the expedition.