

"Insurrection at Harper's Ferry," *Newville (PA) Star and Enterprise*, October 20, 1859
<https://stampedes.dickinson.edu/document/newville-pa-star-and-enterprise-insurrection-harpers-ferry-october-20-1859>

**Insurrection at Harper's Ferry—
Insurrectionists in Possession of
the U. S. Arsenal—Express Train
Fired Into.**

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17.—A despatch just received here from Frederick, and dated this morning, states that an insurrection has broken out at Harper's Ferry, where an armed band 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.

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.

LATER.

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17.—A later despatch received at the railroad office says, the affair has been greatly exaggerated. The reports had their foundation in a difficulty at the Armory, with which negroes had nothing to do.

THIRD DESPATCH.

BALTIMORE, 1 o'clock.—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 due 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.

FOURTH DESPATCH.

BALTIMORE, 2.30 P. M.—The Western train on the Ohio Railroad has just arrived here. Its officers confirm the statements just 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 blacks and whites.

The party is commanded or led by a man named Anderson who had lately arrived at Harper's Ferry.

The President has ordered out Government troops.

The military of Frederickton have been ordered out.

Another account by the way train says that the bridge across the Potomac was filled with insurgents—all armed. Every light in town is extinguished; the hotels are closed; all the streets are in possession of the mob, and every road and lane leading thereto are barricaded and guarded. Men are seen in every quarter with muskets and bayonets; citizens have been arrested and pressed into service, including many negroes. This done, the U. S. Arsenal and a large amount of money, including all the other public works, were seized by the mob. Some were of the

opinion that the object was entirely for plunder, and to mob the government of the funds deposited on Saturday at the pay house. During the night they made a demand on Wager Hotel for provisions, and enforced the claim by a body of armed men. The citizens are in a terrible state of alarm, the insurgents having threatened to burn the town.

EVENING.—A dispatch from Martinsburg, which is situated west of Harper's Ferry, sent via Wheeling and Pittsburg, has just been received. It confirms the report that the insurrectionists have taken possession of the arsenal at Harper's Ferry, and adds that the mob has planted cannon at the bridge, and that the trains had all been stopped. A body of armed men were getting ready to proceed thither to clear the road.—Great excitement existed in that vicinity.

The *American*, of this city, has sent a special reporter by the military expedition, and some definite intelligence, it is expected, will soon be received. The reporter telegraphs from the Relay House that the expedition was joined there by ninety marines from Washington, under the command of Colonel Harris, with two four-pound howitzers.

The following is just received from Monocacy this side of Harper's Ferry:—The mail agent of the western bound train has returned to Monocacy. He reports the train as unable to get through the town, which is in possession of the negroes who arrest every one they can catch and imprison on them. The train due here at 3 P. M. could not get through. The agent came down on an empty engine. The mail train west got as far as Sandy Hook. The baggage master and another party started on foot to the bridge; they went through the bridge and were taken and imprisoned. They went before the captain of the insurrectionists, who refused to let anything pass.—All of the eastern bound trains lying west of the ferry have been seized. The mail train bound west has returned to this station. There are from 500 to 700 whites and blacks engaged in the insurrection.

At four o'clock a train filled with the military consisting of the Law Grays, City Guards, Shield Guards, and other companies, left here for Harper's Ferry. Several representatives of the press accompany the train.

WASHINGTON CITY, Oct. 17, 3 o'clock, P. M.—On receipt of intelligence from Harper's Ferry, orders were issued for the companies of artillery at Old Point to proceed to the scene of disturbance without delay. The marines, ninety-three in number, left in the 2.15 train with two twelve pound howitzers, and a full supply of ammunition. It is reported that they are under orders to force a passage over the bridge to-night at all hazards. Col Faulkner accompanies them. It is reported on good authority that some weeks ago Secretary Floyd received an anonymous epistle stating that about the 15th October, the abolitionists, negroes and other disaffected persons would make an attempt to seize the arsenal and hold the place, but the statement was so indefinite and improbable as to cause no fears of such an outbreak.

RICHMOND, October 17.—Nine o'clock, P. M.—Great excitement exists here in consequence of

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the insurrection at Harper's Ferry. The Grays are under leave for Harper's Ferry to start early in the morning. Company F. with full ranks, have just left their armory, expecting to take a special train to-night. This is a new company, wearing a similar uniform to the Grays. The Governor left to-night for Washington.

WASHINGTON CITY, Oct. 17---10 o'clock, 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 their immediate suppression. The President, through the Mayor of Washington, ordered a strong detachment of the volunteer militia to be posted at National and company armories, which was promptly done; two hundred stand of muskets and ammunition have also been placed in City Hall for an emergency. It has been 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 the government dam at Harper's Ferry absconded, largely indebted to several hundred employees who have taken this step to indemnify themselves by the seizure of the government funds, which, it was supposed, had been transported thither on Saturday.

A gentleman who has just arrived from Harper's Ferry thinks that the blacks are only participants in the outbreak by compulsion.

BALTIMORE, Oct. 17, 10 P. M.,---The *American's* special reporter telegraphs from Plane No. 4, forty-five miles from Baltimore and thirty-one miles from Harper's Ferry, as follows.---Eight o'clock: The train consists of seventeen cars and 400 troops under Maj. Reynolds, with the road master and laborers to repair the track, and telegraphers to mend the line. Three companies from Frederick are in advance of the train. Col. Harris, of the U. S. Marines, follows in a special train; he will not reach Harper's Ferry before 10 o'clock.

MARTINSBURG, Oct. 18---2.30 A. M.---The troops on arriving at Harper's Ferry found that the insurrection had in truth been quite a serious affair. The insurgents, commanded by a Capt. Brown, of Kansas notoriety, had taken possession of the town as stated, and barricaded themselves in the armory.

Previous to our arrival, the Virginia troops had made a successful assault on the rioters at the bridge and driven them to their barricade. Several lives were lost on both sides. Some sixteen persons are known to have been killed, several of the Virginia Military included.

One of the rioters now dying has confessed the whole plot. He says Brown was the originator, and promised his followers that the negroes in Virginia and Maryland would rise by thousands and both States would be made free. Large numbers of slaves are said to have gone towards Pennsylvania.

DETAILS OF THE STORMING,

HARPER'S FERRY, Oct. 18, 10½ A. M.---The marines, under Col. Lee, after summoning the rioters to surrender, and they having refused, ordered the door of the Government building to be broken in about 7 o'clock.

A file of marines fired upon the rioters with fatal effect, killing four almost instantly, including the leader, Brown. The other two were taken prisoners.

None of the gentlemen kept in custody by the rioters were injured.

But one negro was of the party. Four others being prisoners, and taken from the neighborhood, were released.

Private Quinn, of the marines, was mortally wounded by Brown, and another marine [received a flesh wound in the hip.

The names of the rioters shot are Ottawatomie Brown, of Kansas, who received a sword cut in the forehead and a bayonet stab in the kidneys, undoubtedly mortal. His son, O. Brown, was killed yesterday. Stewart Taylor killed instantly. J. G. Johnson killed almost instantly.

HARPER'S FERRY, Oct. 18---11½ A. M.---The riot has been completely quelled, and everything is again tranquil.

All the ringleaders in the disturbance have been killed, and the prisoners whom they took have been safely rescued. Among these are:---

Armistead Ball, chief draughtsman at the Armory.

Benjamin Mills, master of the Armory.

J. E. P. Dangerfield, pay master's clerk.

Lewis Washington, farmer, and a prominent citizen.

John Allstadt, farmer, and son sixteen years of age.

The three last named were seized on their farms several miles from the Ferry.

Among the slain are also Fontaine Beckham, Railroad Agent; Sheppard Hayward, negro porter at the railroad station; Joseph Burley, of Harper's Ferry; Evan Dorsey and George Richardson, of Martinsburg. A full list of the killed and wounded will be forwarded as soon as possible. One of the rioters named Leary who has since died, made a statement that the plot was conceived by Brown at the Ohio State Fair, held two months ago.

Gov. Wise is expected from the Relay House where he arrived this morning.

It is stated that a son of Brown, who has assumed the name of Capt. Cook, is at a school-house only four miles distant, with a large gang of runaway slaves.

Edwin Coppee, of Iowa, Watson Brown, son of O. Brown, who was wounded yesterday, and a negro named Green, from Harrisburg, Pa., were taken prisoners. The dead bodies were brought out and laid upon the grass, and presented a shocking spectacle, the Minnie rifle-balls cutting deep gashes in their bodies.

[The negro Green, mentioned above, was very prominent a few years ago in a slave riot at Harrisburg, Pa., on the arrest of two fugitives slaves.]

The Independent Greys have been sent out two miles distant to capture another party.