

Resource Sheet # 9

The following is a transcript of an article written regarding the events in Christiana on September 12, 1851. This article was found in the *Lancaster Intelligencer and Journal* on September 16, 1851.

Horrible Murder

The Fruits of the Doctrines Advocated by Johnson and Stevens

The following letter from an intelligent correspondent at Columbia gives the particulars of the horrible Negro Riot and Murder perpetrated near Christiana in this county:

Friend Sanders – The murder of Edward Gorsuch, Esq. By the Negroes and white abolitionists of Lancaster County, has filled the public mind in this community with but one feeling, and that a feeling of indignation commensurate with the atrocity of the murder. The following particulars were present at the murder, and who received a wound himself upon the head from one of the rebellious Negroes, just as Mr. Gorsuch felt.

Mr. G. was in pursuit of two or three runaway Negroes, accompanied by his son, his nephew, two cousins, and the Deputy Marshall and a police officer, in all seven persons. Very early in the morning, this party approached a shanty in which was supposed to be secreted the runaways, and soon perceived a Negro running ahead of them whom Mr. Gorsuch recognized as his boy. They tried to intercept his reaching the house, but the Negro succeeded in getting in and ascended to the loft, interposing a barrier between himself and the pursuing party. Baffled thus in accomplishing their object, the party came out to reconnoiter the premises, and as Mr. G was passing by an exposed place, a Negro from the shanty fired at him, but without effect. The Negroes now commenced blowing horns, keeping the party at abeyance at the same time. The neighborhood soon became alarmed and in the space of three quarters of an hour, two hundred Negroes had assembled, most of whom were armed with guns, and many of them came on horse back. At this critical juncture, a white man was perceived among the Negroes, encouraging them on to resistance. The Marshall instantly read his warrant to the white man, and ordered him to assist in preserving the peace, and in executing the law of the country. This he refused to do, and told the Marshall that “no arrest should or could be made there without spilling blood,” at which the Negroes cheered and yelled like furies. The marshal then declared his determination to hold the white man responsible for the value of the slaves and ordered the party to retire, which they were doing when Mr. Gorsuch, who had hitherto been surrounded by the Negroes, turned round and said that he would have his boys, before he left the neighborhood; upon declaring which he received a blow on the posterior of the head from some sharp instrument supposed to be a scythe, by a Negro. This blow knocked him forward, and as he was falling, another Negro discharged a gun, containing shot and slug into the superior portion of the right lung producing instant death. When Mr. Gorsuch fell, his son rushed forward to the body of his father and discharged his revolver among the party of murderers, but with what effect is not known. He received several shot himself and would have been dispatched but the Negroes took

alarm at their bloody work and dispersed, yelling like demons incarnate. The young man's life is in a very critical situation.

Mr. Gorsuch was a class leader in the M.E. Church – about sixty-three years of age, and enjoyed universal esteem as a neighbor, citizen, and Christian. He lived near Muncton, Baltimore Co., Md., and is reputed to be quite wealthy. His body was taken through this place this morning en route for his former residence, and was visited by large numbers of our citizens.

He was a horribly murdered man, and a fearful retribution hangs over the heads of his murderers.

P.S. – About 50 of our citizens are now, 10 o'clock at night, waiting to start down in the cars, in company with some Marylanders, to make arrests. Wo to them who resist!

Columbia, September 12, 1851.

Simultaneously with the intelligence of the Negro riot at Christiana, and the murder of the owner of the fugitive slaves, it was announced that Gov. Johnston had arrived at Philadelphia, on another electioneering tour, and intended to remain for several days, perhaps weeks, in the eastern portion of the State. Thus, for months at a stretch does this Abolition Whig Governor absent himself from the seat of government – and riots and bloodshed may accrue in consequence of the Abolition sentiments he advances, and yet there is, practically, no Chief Magistrate at Harrisburg to take cognizance of the outrages of the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth! Truly we have fallen on evil times, when a citizen of an adjoining State, in the lawful pursuit of his property, may be murdered in our midst, and the Executive of the Commonwealth (to whose policy may be traced the outrage) roaming about in quest of votes, instead of being at his post to enforce the utmost rigor of the law against the white and black murderers! Gov. Johnston should have been at the seat of government, where the Constitution intends he should be at all times, and at once offered a liberal reward for the apprehension of the guilty parties, even had it operated with severity against some of his Abolition friends who instigated the riot and, perhaps, assisted in perpetrating the murder. As it is – for anything Johnston has done – the murderers are still running at large, ready again to shoot down or cut the throat of the next master that may come along on the hunt of his slaves. Can such a state of things be longer tolerated by our law abiding, law loving people? The second Tuesday of October will answer the question through the medium of the ballot box.

Since the above was in type, we are gratified to learn that two white men, named Castner Hanway and Elijah Lewis, and nine Negroes have been arrested as accessories, and are now in our prison awaiting their trial for murder. The slave who, it is supposed, killed his master, has not been arrested. Too much praise cannot be awarded to the Deputy Prosecuting Attorney of this County, John L. Thompson, Esq., and Alderman J. Franklin Reigart, of this city, who promptly repaired to the scene of the bloodshed on Friday morning and succeeded, with the aid of a number of the citizens in that neighborhood and the hands on the public works of the State, in ferreting out and arresting the guilty ones, and having the brought here and imprisoned on the same day.

The following facts, taken from the deposition of H.H. Kline, Esq., Deputy Marshal, who was with Mr. Gorsuch at the time of his death, will explain the whole transaction in a satisfactory manner to our readers:

Mr. K. states in his deposition that they got to the house at which the slaves were secreted about daylight on Thursday morning. As they approached it they were discovered by a colored man who gave the alarm. The blacks were upstairs. He (K.) went to the stairway door and told the man who occupied the house that he wanted him to come down so that he might talk to him about the two slaves secreted there. He heard them loading their guns upstairs. Mr. Gorsuch then came to the door and called the slaves by name. He told them that he would take them along, treat them kindly, and forgive them all. He then went out of the house, looked up to the window and called them. They then fired at him, but did not hit him. He then fired his revolver at them. He (K.) had read his warrant aloud to them before they fired. He gave them ten minutes to consider – during which time a white man came riding up, named Castner Hanway. He called upon him to assist in the name of the United States. Hanway replied he would not and did not care for any act of Congress. By that time, another white man, named Elijah Lewis, came up, and demanded his authority. He showed it to him, and he then turned round and told the Negroes they had a right to defend themselves. About this time, some 15 or 20 Negroes, armed with guns, came up in the same direction the white men came. They came with their guns pointed at him and ready cocked. – He begged the white men to keep them from firing, and said he would withdraw his men and leave the Negroes go. Hanway said the Negroes had a right to defend themselves and he would not interfere. – About this time another gang of Negroes came on the ground armed with guns and clubs. Hanway rode towards them and said something. Our men then run, and the Negroes commenced firing on them. He had left Mr. Gorsuch at the house coaxing the slaves to go with him. The Negroes fired on the old man, and he fell, but cannot tell whether it was a shot from the window or from the gang outside that killed him. The son ran to his assistance. – Joshua Gorsuch, Dr. Pierce and Dickerson Gorsuch were all wounded – the latter dangerously. He is now lying very low. The party then retreated to Penningtonville.

On the evening of Friday, the Philadelphia authorities arrived on the ground, and, during Saturday some eighteen or twenty more blacks and one white man were arrested, five of whom are now in our prison, and the rest taken to Philadelphia to be tried there in the U.S. Court.

Governor Johnston, under the impression no doubt that it was “better late than never,” and fearful of the effect the Abolition Riot at Christiana might have on his political prospects, issued a Proclamation on yesterday (*four days after the murder!*) offering a reward of \$1,000 for the apprehension of the guilty parties! This, it strikes us, is only, adding insult to injury.

<http://www.lancasterhistory.org/highlights/afamelectronic/christianasept161851.htm>