John Starry Testimony
John Brown Primary Sources Lesson
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JOHN D. STARRY, sworn and examined.

By the CHAIRMAN:

Chairman: Will you state at what time you first heard of the presence of an armed party at Harper's Ferry; where you heard it; and what occurred when you first became aware of it?

Starry. On Sunday night, the 16th of October, about half past one o'clock, I heard a shot fired in the direction of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad bridge and immediately afterwards a cry of distress, as if somebody had been hurt.

At the same time I heard considerable confusion about the Baltimore and Ohio railroad train-the starting point just opposite the hotel.

I jumped out of my bed. I went to the window and saw two armed men passing from the bridge towards the armory gate. These men were low fellows.

While I was standing there a tall man came from the direction of the armory gate, and met them near the Winchester railroad. Some noise about the hotel attracted his attention, and he turned and went towards the armory gate again. About that time some of the passengers came out from between the hotel and the railroad station, and the tall man said to them, "The first man that fires at me I will shoot," or, "the first man who interrupts me," or some such expression as that.

In a very short time I was in the street, and there was some firing going on between the railroad party or citizens and that man. I did not know who fired first. There were several shots passed between them.

I was then going across the street towards the railroad office. When I got there I found the Negro porter, Hayward, shot; the ball entering from behind, through the body, nearly on a line with the base of the heart, a little below it. He told me that he had been out on the railroad bridge looking for a watchman who was missing, and he had been ordered to halt by some men who were there, and, instead of doing that, he turned to go back to the office and as he turned they shot him in the back. I understood from him that he walked from there to the office, and when I found him he was lying on a plank upon two chairs in the office.

Chairman: Could you see whether those men were armed?

Starry: Yes, sir; I knew they were armed. I stood until they were very close to me.

About four o'clock I heard a wagon coming down the street. About five minutes after five o'clock, I saw a four-horse team driving over the Baltimore and Ohio railroad bridge. I did not know whose it was. In that wagon there were three men standing up in the front part, with spears in their hands, white men, and two were walking alongside, armed with rifles. I did not see any Negroes.

I understood afterwards there were Negroes with them, but I did not see them.

About daylight, as these strangers seemed to have possession of the public works there, I determined to get on my horse and go and notify Mr. Kitzmiller, acting superintendent of the armory, of the condition of things there, but before I did that I went to the island of Virginius, and roused up Mr. Welch and others there. I knew there were a good many men about the mill and cooper-shop there. I told them the condition of things as well as I could. I met no one on the way.

I then got my horse and came out into Shenandoah Street, and had to go perhaps fifty yards before I made the turn of the street leading to the hill. About the time I was making that turn, I saw three of these men coming across from the armory gate towards the arsenal. They had just made a few steps from the gate into the street. I did not know whether their intention was to stop me or not. They made a sort of half turn, and I was out of their sight in a moment.

I went to Mr. Kitzmiller and informed him that the armory was in possession of an armed band. I then passed up to Bolivar, and roused up some of the people, and went from there to Hall's Works, and found three of these men there armed. I went back to the hillside then, and tried to get the citizens together, to see what we could do to get rid of these fellows. They seemed to be very troublesome. When I got on the hill I learned that they had shot Boerley. That was probably about 7 o'clock. Boerley was an Irishman, living there, a citizen of the town. He died very soon afterwards.

I had ordered the Lutheran church bell to be rung to get the citizens together to see what sort of arms they had; I found one or two squirrel rifles and a few shot guns; I had sent a messenger to Charlestown in the meantime for Captain Rowan, commander of a volunteer company there: I also sent messengers to the Baltimore and Ohio railroad to stop the trains coming east, and not let them approach the Ferry, and also a messenger to Shepherdstown.

When I could find no guns fit for use, and learned from the operatives and foremen at the armory that all the guns that they knew of were in the arsenal and in possession of these men, I thought I had better go to Charlestown myself, perhaps; I did so, and hurried Captain Rowan off.

When I returned to the Ferry, I found that the citizens had gotten some guns out of one of the workshops -guns which had been placed there to keep them out of the high water -and were pretty well armed.

I assisted, from that time until some time in the night, in various ways, organizing the citizens and getting them to the best place of attack, and sometimes acting professionally.

Chairman: Were you aware of the killing of any other person than this free Negro you have mentioned?

Starry: No, sir; I did not see the others; I saw Mr. Turner after he was dead, and also Mr. Beckham; I did not know that Mr. Turner was shot until after he was dead.

Chairman: Did you see this man Brown during that night, so as to identify him that you know of?

Starry. I do not think I did; I asked him afterwards if he was at the armory gate when I was there, but he said he was not, and did not know why I had not been taken prisoner.

Chairman: Did you see any of Brown's party killed?

Starry: I saw a man shot in the Potomac River on Monday; I suppose about one 0' clock. He was shot from near the small bridge, at the upper end of the trestle work, or from the hill side. He was attempting to cross the Potomac River from the Virginia to the Maryland side.

Chairman: How many of the Brown party did you see dead, including those who were in the engine-house?

Starry: Four dead and Stevens wounded, and the yellow fellow Leary wounded. I saw ten of Brown's party dead altogether, including those in the engine-house.

Chairman: How many of those ten were Negroes?

Starry: I only give you the names of the Negroes as given to me by Stevens - Leary and Anderson and Daingerfield Newby were the Negroes killed. Anderson was of very light color, but was given to me by Stevens, one of the party, as a colored man.

Chairman: Do you know the number of citizens who were killed?

Starry: Four: three white men and the Negro Hayward. Hayward first, Boerley, Mr. Turner, and Mr. Beckham. Beckham was the last shot, about four o'clock in the evening.

Chairman: Were there any of the citizens wounded?

Starry: Edward McCabe was wounded. There were some of the Berkeley men wounded, who were acting as military. I do not know any other citizen of Harper's Ferry who was wounded but McCabe.