

The Catholic Herald: Thursday, May 9, 1844

Riot- The neighborhood of our city has been for some days past the scene of riot and bloodshed. It originated on occasion of a meeting of the Native American Party on Monday last, in Kensington, to express indignation at the disturbance of a former meeting by the Irish population of that District. The meeting went on without interruption until the rain forced an adjournment to the Market House, where a scuffle occurred between two individuals. We borrow the account from the "Public Ledger."

From what we could see and gather from persons on the spot, we believe the following was the origin of the affray:

After the re-organization of the meeting in the market house, and Mr. Levin had taken his position with the view of resuming his speech, some difficulty occurred on the western side of the market house, just inside, between two persons, named Fields and McLaughlin, which originated in some discussion, and led to an interference on the part of two or three others, one of whom, a young fellow, drew a pair of pistols, threatening to shoot the first man who should molest him. At this instant, a man who had taken some part in the affair stepped off towards the Hibernia Hose house, and defied him to fire. A shot then took place, which was followed by repeated discharges from both sides from one of which Patrick Fisher received his wounds.

The contest continued for more than an hour. At dark, large bodies of men and boys were congregated at various points, and everything indicated a resumption of the outrages. The sheriff was on the ground after the severest part of the conflict, and was effecting arrangements to secure future peace and quietness. Those that were injured were engaged in the fight.

12 o'clock.-We have just returned from the scene of the riot. About 10 o'clock in the evening, a mob collected in the vicinity of Franklin and Second streets, and commenced breaking into the houses on both sides of the street, destroying the furniture, demolishing the windows, and rendering the houses completely uninhabitable. The inmates of all the dwellings in the neighborhood fled with precipitation, abandoning their homes to the ruthlessness of the mob.

This continued for some time without any resistance being offered. At length an attack was made upon a Seminary at the corner of Second and Phoenix streets formerly occupied by the Sisters of Charity, and a number of persons were about tearing down and setting fire to the fence, when some persons advanced from above and fired a volley of ball and buckshot amongst the crowd.

On Tuesday a meeting of the Native Americans was called in the State House Yard, and they were invited to come armed for defence. After some speeches they adjourned to the scene of action in Kensington and several thousands marched to the spot. We take the remainder of our statement from the "U.S. Gazette."

Most of those present moved in a body to Kensington (at the corner of Second and Master streets) and proceeded to organize a meeting, but they had scarcely nailed up their flag, when a number of boys made an attack upon Hibernia Hose house. A number of shots were then fired from houses in the vicinity toward

the meeting, and the native Americans, after dispersing for a moment, rallied and attacked the hose house, took out the carriage, ran the hose off the reel, and then broke the apparatus up. An old tender, the property of the Washington Hose Company, which was also in the house, was broken up likewise. The Native Americans then (between 4 and 5 o'clock) took possession of the Market House, and for the next three hours, the shots were frequent from the houses in the western vicinity. Men were seen lying upon the roofs of a row of houses fronting the Market; and in every place of concealment near the same place, others were occasionally discovered.

About five o'clock another attack was made upon the hose house, when a large new bell found in it was brought out into the open square and shattered to pieces. Shortly after this, a frame dwelling house, next to the hose house was fired, and from that time up to nine o'clock in the evening, the flames continued to spread without stay, until twenty-nine houses were consumed, the greater part of them being upon Cadwalader street, and four upon the street facing the Market house caught fire, and at 9 o'clock lay in a heap of ruins.

At seven o'clock, the First Brigade, and two Companies of the Third Brigade, came on the ground, under the command of Gen. Cadwalader and formed on Master street, facing north. Cannon were stationed so as to range on the street facing the Market, and on Master street westward. A detachment of two Companies under command of Col. Murray, marched to the north end of the Market, and formed a cordon across the street. The Military had previously been formed in like manner on Master street.

The Sheriff then detached a number of his Constabulary force (which had preceded the Military on the march up) and proceeded to examine all the houses from which shots had been fired. In one of them a man named John Holmes, was found, and in the same room in which he was, was a rifle heavily loaded. He was brought out and consigned to the care of the military.

In the meantime General Cadwalader made a brief address to the great crowd assembled below Master street, urging them to preserve peace, and to act in cooperation with the military. The whole affair rested in the hands of the law and he was bound to see that the settlement was lawfully made.

He made no distinction-knew neither friend nor foe in the matter, and was determined at all hazards to see the majesty of the law vindicated. This brief address of which we have hardly given the substance, seemed to meet the general approbation: and during the entire evening the crowd of persons collected seemed disposed to let matters rest in the hands of the civil and military force.

At 8 1/2 o'clock, members of the Carroll Hose Company commenced to throw water upon the burning dwellings and succeeded in stopping the progress of the fire northward. At nine o'clock, the United States Engine arrived on the ground, under escort of a detachment of the Lafayette Light Guards, and immediately went into service. The Assistance Engine shortly afterwards went into service, also under an escort of military and shortly afterwards nearly the whole Fire Department was upon the ground. The fire was then stayed, but not until a vast amount of property was destroyed.

The number of wounded persons is considerable, and deaths amount in all to seven or eight, as far as we can gather from the newspaper accounts. The whole scene is one which every good citizen and good Christian must deplore, and the men who strive to fan the flame, instead of allaying it are responsible for the blood that is shed. May peace and charity regain their reign!

Sheriff McMichael was unceasing in his efforts to put an end to the riots. The military were called out at four o'clock in the afternoon, and they were put in motion

at seven o'clock. Had they arrived on the ground at four o'clock, the terrible destruction of life would have been prevented, and the conflagration would not have taken place.

A meeting of Catholics, we understand, was held last evening, at the Cathedral of St. John, for the purpose of considering and adopting measures to allay the excitement.

A placard, worded in the following manner, was posted about the streets in the early part of the day:

To the Catholics of the City and County of Philadelphia

The melancholy riot yesterday, which resulted in the death of several of our fellow beings, calls for our deep sorrow, and it becomes all who have had any share in the tragical scene to humble themselves before God, and to sympathise deeply and sincerely with those whose relatives and friends have fallen. I earnestly conjure you all to avoid all occasion of excitement, and to shun all public places of assemblage, and to do nothing that in any way may exasperate.

Follow peace with all men, and have that charity without which no man can see God.

Francis Patrick,
Bishop of Philadelphia
Philadelphia, May 7th, 1844

The excitement during yesterday afternoon and evening was of the most intense character. In the vicinity of the scenes of violence, business appeared to be at a stand, and at every step one met little gathering of persons anxiously discussing the probable and terrible consequences of the outbreak, or narrating the latest act of violence out of the many with which the hour teemed. Many were actually frantic for revenge.

The scene during the continuance of the conflagration was awfully grand. A great sea of fire raged, the roaring noise of which was heard at a considerable distance, mingled with the crash of falling timbers or tumbling walls. People were hurrying hither and thither, anxiously endeavoring to save their property; and on the open lots adjacent, piles of furniture were heaped up promiscuously. Women and children, made houseless by the destruction of their homes, were gathered in the vicinity, and the whole scene had its appropriate climax in the glitter of the arms and accoutrements of the soldiers, the cannon and their guards, and the dense and dark mass of people by which the whole square was hemmed in.

The Military remained on the ground during the greater part of the night.

Wednesday, 5 o'clock, P.M.

We have just learned that St. Michael's Church has been burned down, in defiance of the military force stationed there to protect it.

The School House, lately occupied by the Sisters of Charity, is also burnt, Where these lawless acts are to end, cannot be told.

10 o'clock. St. Augustine's Church, within the city is now in a blaze, as also the dwelling attached to it.