

Upper Marlborough 18th Mch. 1864

To His Excellency
Governor Bradford
Sir:

My having been confined to a sick bed for the past week will be my apology for not having before called your attention, officially, to the following circumstance.

On the afternoon of the 8th Inst. a large number of negro troops, from Birney's camp at Benedict arrived at this place under the command of one Lt. Col. Perkins and other white officers, and took possession of the Court House for quarters.

The next morning a squad of the negroes was sent into the County Jail, of which they had previously demanded the keys, and set at liberty twenty one of the prisoners - leaving only one person behind, a white man charged with Larceny. Of those released, one was a white man brought here recently from Washington under a requisition from your Excellency. Eleven were confined on various criminal charges, some being already under indictment and awaiting trial. The charges varied from Arson to Larceny, abducting slaves &c. One of the negroes released was actually under conviction of Arson - his sentence having been respited by the Court until April term.

As soon as our Sheriff reached the village, he hastened after the Military who had started for Annapolis. The Lt. Colonel had stated that his orders were only to take out the able bodied negroes &c and that the Jailor was responsible for the escape of the others. Yet all of them were released by a large armed squad, & at the very point of the bayonet. Still the Sheriff followed on to Queen Anne, hoping to have restored at least the women and boys &c. But he met with no success, was roughly treated, and even threatened with personal violence.

The occurrence of so unprecedented an outrage, within 18 miles of the National Capital, ought not probably to pass unnoticed. I had thought of communicating the facts to Mr. Johnson of the Senate, and to our Member in the House of Representatives - But upon reflection I supposed I should best discharge myself of my duties in the premises by placing you in possession of the facts, and leaving the whole matter to your superior experience and discretion. Your Excellency will not fail to observe that the practical working of this affair is to invite the negroes to the perpetration of any crime, and to offer practical protection & indemnity to them. It seems impossible that this man could have acted under orders.

Very Respy Your obdt. servt.

Edward W. Belt, States Atty.

P.S. One of the negro women released & taken along by them was under indictment for attempting to poison a white family - The troops and prisoners went from here to Annapolis.