

"The Arrest of Joseph Shaw, Part 1"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

The American Civil War severely tested the very fiber of American society as the war quickly brought about the suspension of basic rights. The situation was especially difficult in Maryland given the divided loyalties of Marylanders and the location of the nation's capitol. Union forces occupied the state during the spring of 1861 and ensured that Washington would not end up in the Confederacy.

Union troops came to Westminster in August 1862 and arrested a number of local men who were accused of being secessionist sympathizers. Joseph Shaw, editor of the Western Maryland Democrat newspaper wrote of their arrest and detainment in the September 4th issue of his paper:

"Kidnapped"

On Thursday morning of last week, we in connection with sixteen others of the Town and County were kidnapped and carried off to Baltimore and placed in the Central Police Station, and there detained until Monday evening when we were released by order of Maj. Gen. Wool.

Among those arrested, in connection with ourself, were two of the hands in the Office, and this we deem a sufficient apology for the appearance of the Democrat in half-sheet this week.

The circumstances of the arrests are these: on Wednesday evening of last week there appeared in Westminster a company of soldiers, on the 5:30 train from Baltimore, numbering some 80 or 100 men of the Fourth Maryland Regiment, under Capt. Gregory Barret. They encamped in a lot near the depot, and early Thursday morning a squad of them went through the town making arrests. We were at the city hotel and did not suppose they had any designs on us, and had the strongest doubts whether they had any authority to arrest anybody. We however came up to our office and found that they had been after one of the workmen, and had actually arrested him, and that the others had left, and gone down to the depot, and, in a few minutes we learned that they had arrested another. We then walked up street, and stepped into Mr. Orendorff's store. While we were in there we saw the squad go past and watched them until we saw them stop in front of the office. We then passed through a door which led down into a cellar, supposing that if they should not see us we should escape arrest. We were not there long however until we were informed that they were in search of us, and that Mrs. Frazer had informed where we were. We however were determined not to leave the town and made up our mind that there was no escape for us. We then walked out of the cellar down through the lot to the stable. While we were there we saw the soldiers looking through the lot, we then walked up through the lot towards Capt. Barret, who commanded us to halt and demanded our name, we told him, when a thickset ruffian of a looking fellow (whose name we afterwards learned was Sampson) rushed up to us with a drawn sword and said if he had caught us concealed he would have killed us; he took hold of our arm, and marched us down to the depot and put us into a small railroad car where we found twelve others who had been arrested during the morning. They made no charge and showed no authority by which the arrest was made. Here we were detained with a strict guard over us until nine o'clock on Saturday morning, giving us not a mouthful to eat and permitting no one to leave the car for a single moment for any purpose without a guard over him and nothing was permitted to be brought in without being submitted to the inspection of Sergeant of the Guard and no one was permitted to talk to us without his permission.

It will be remembered that this company is composed of that portion of the citizens of Baltimore who composed the secret political clubs in the reign of Know-Nothingism. Capt. Barret was the Captain of the Rip-Raps, and one of them told us there were not twenty of them who had not been in jail or in the penitentiary.

On Saturday we started in the 9:15 train for Baltimore, where we arrived at 12:30 and was detained at the depot under strict guard, no one permitted to come to us or speak to us, without permission of the Captain, and no note or letter could be sent out without being submitted to his inspection.

About two o'clock we were marched out of the car, sixteen of us in all, between files of soldiers up to the Central Police Station where we were closely confined in a small dark room, about 6 to 12 ft., where we were detained, perhaps an hour, not permitted to see or speak to anyone, when orders came to get ready our baggage that we were to leave that place. We were then marched by Captain Barret through the middle of the street, and under files of soldiers, attended by crowds of people on the pavements, pointing at us as thieves, guerrillas, etc., up to the Eutaw House where we were detained to be gazed at and insulted by Union people and Government soldiers. A Col. came up and told us we should not speak to any body on the street, cursed us, and said this was a republican government. After a time Gen. Wool came out and ask several of us in the front ranks what we were arrested for, we told him we did not know, when Capt. Barret stepped up and said this was part of a guerrilla band he had captured up in Carroll County.

We will just here remark that the soldiers got out the report that their camp was fired into the first night they were in Westminster, so one of them told us going down to Baltimore he had got the report that five of them had been killed, and this aroused the indignity of the people in the city, such as believed it, or would pretend they believed it.

After about an hour's delay we were marched from the Eutaw House down Baltimore Street, thence down Baltimore Street to Holliday, thence down Holliday, to Saratoga, and down Saratoga to the Station House where we were again placed in the same small dark room. It was now about night. Nobody was permitted to see us and we were permitted to communicate with no one. The floor was very dirty and no chairs to sit on; we were all now very much discouraged; we supposed the prospect for staying there at least till Monday, without anything to eat, and nothing but a dirty floor to sleep on, and that not large enough for us all to be on at once, before we should get a hearing, began to loom up before us with all its terrors."

Please see next week's column for the conclusion of Shaw's article.

Photo caption: Joseph Shaw was at the City Hotel in Westminster when he learned Union troops were looking for southern sympathizers in August 1862. The structure at the corner of E. Main and Court Streets, later known as the Main Court Inn, was demolished in 1940. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.