

McClintock Riot

Freedom seekers often traveled through the Cumberland Valley. Being so close to the Mason-Dixon line made South-Central Pennsylvania a particularly dangerous place as slavecatchers were operating throughout the region. Feelings about abolition in Cumberland County were divided. Tension between the North and South came to a head in Cumberland County when, in 1847, two enslavers near Shippensburg captured three runaways: Lloyd Brown, Hester, and Ann. Seeking a certificate to transport them south, the enslavers placed the group in county jail for safekeeping before their return to Maryland. Despite John McClintock, a Dickinson College professor and abolitionist, arguing that state law prohibited aiding slave-catchers, the judge ruled in favor of the enslavers. Word quickly spread and a crowd of civilians stormed to the courthouse and a riot ensued. The crowd rescued Hester, who was married to a freed man in Carlisle, and Ann, by hiding her in a closet by cellar. Lloyd was taken back into slavery. During the resistance, one of the slave owners was trampled. At first his injuries did not seem severe, but he died from his injuries soon afterward.

John McClintock and thirty-three members of the local African American community were charged with inciting a riot. One of those charged, George Norman, was the husband of Hester. Twenty-one of the defendants, including McClintock, were found not guilty. Thirteen of the thirty-four were found guilty. Eleven of those were sentenced to three years of solitary confinement at Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia. This punishment was appealed and almost a year later the PA Supreme Court reversed the decision, as those found guilty should have been serving their sentence at the county jail. The eleven, including George Norman, were released with time served.