

Lewis Leary, trying to escape was struck in his back by a bullet as he waded across the Shenandoah River. Leary, mortally wounded, slowly died as day turned to dusk, saying as his last words, "I am ready to die." He had left his wife and child at Oberlin, Ohio, to enlist with John Brown.

Dangerfield Newby died from a gunshot wound to his head at the lower end of High Street in Harpers Ferry. His body was mutilated. Townspeople "cut off his genitals, slit his throat, and rammed sticks into his wounds." His ears were cut off. "The Town's hogs finished off the body." Newby had hoped to free his wife and children enslaved on a plantation at Brentville, Virginia.

Before his execution and on the eve of his abortive attempt to seize the Harpers Ferry arsenal, John Brown spoke of the provisional army's future. In reality, it was an epitaph for all who would die. *"We have only one life to live, and once to die, and if we lose our lives it will do more for the cause than our lives would be worth in any other way."* And so it is as it was.

What more can be said?

These men joined their lives, tears, and blood in the great torrent of blood and tears that was to be the Civil War's terrible swift sword.

Abraham Lincoln captured in words the Civil

War holocaust in his second inaugural when he phrased the reasons for the war, *"Fondly do we hope-ferently do we pray-that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."* In Lincoln's mind the Civil War was the awful justice of the Lord God Jehovah. The entire nation had to pay a costly price for slavery.

The legacy of that cost is still with us.

Some of the information in this text comes from *Six years of Hell: Harpers Ferry During the Civil War* by Chester G. Hern

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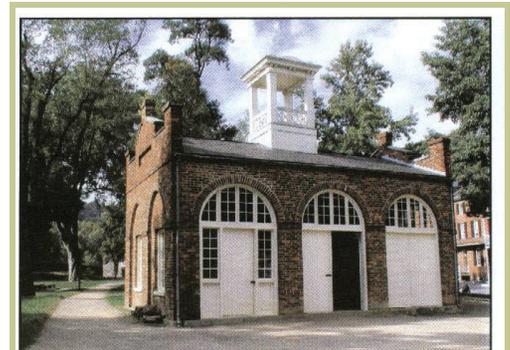
TOWN OF HARPERS FERRY

JOHN BROWN

AND

HIS BLACK RAIDERS

Harpers Ferry shares with Canada a great moment in American and Canadian history. The events surrounding John Brown in Chatham, Ontario and Harpers Ferry, West Virginia united the two communities in one of the most momentous events in the history of North America.



John Brown's Fort in 1995 sits about 150 feet from its original location

The initial actions by John Brown in Chatham are as follows: In a secret conclave in Chatham on May 8, 1858, "Captain" John Brown wrote a new constitution, establishing a Provisional Government of the United States that dealt with the slavery issue. In a quick election, Captain Brown became the Commander in Chief of the Provisional Army. This amorphous band began to take shape with recruits in New England, New York, Kansas and Canada. The tocsin call to battle had been sounded! The army was gathering to emancipate the slaves for a future freedom's redoubt in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. There the federal arsenal would provide the military means to save the United States from the sin of slavery. This plan would be a religious, as well as a political battle.

The liberating agents would be Brown's sons, Owen, Oliver and Watson, thirteen other whites, and five blacks for a total of twenty one. Brown's secretary of war, John Henry Kagi's whose call to Canada had produced two blacks, Steward Taylor, a spiritualist, and Osborn P. Anderson, a printer. From Oberlin, Ohio, came John A. Copeland and his uncle, Lewis Leary. Two freed slaves joined the army of liberation, Shields Green and Dangerfield Newby. These recruits, led

by a man who resembled an Old Testament prophet, slowly made their way in the rain and fog to Harpers Ferry for a rendezvous with destiny. The day of march was October 16, 1859. The fire engine house, later John Brown's Fort, was quickly taken and the two watchmen were captured. To his captives, John Brown announced his intentions: "I came here from Kansas, and this is a slave state. I have possession of the United States Armory, and if citizens interfere with me, I must burn the town and have blood!"

While Brown had achieved his initial objective, the operation went down hill from this point. Soon, the surrounding community, officials in Washington, Baltimore, and Richmond were made aware of the commotions in Harpers Ferry.

Most of the black men who accompanied Brown had lives that are lost in the mists of memory along with their names, what they did and what happened to them. This brochure concentrates on the black men who were neither slaves nor citizens. Ironically, the first death at the hands of John Brown's army would be Heyward Shepherd, the night baggage man at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad station. He was a free black shot by Watson Brown where he was surprised by a voice that had ordered him to halt. Our world is filled with ironies such as this. Later on the Mayor of Harpers Ferry, Fontaine Beckham, would lose his life. He was shot at the railroad station by one of John Brown's sharp shooters, Edwin Coppoc.

Beckham was well liked by blacks and whites. He had become angry at the death of his friend and co-worker at the train station. Beckham's murder enraged the citizens of Harpers Ferry. They became an angry screaming mob seeking vengeance.

Those blacks who followed John Brown's seizure of the arsenal, at first successful, ended in failure. The failure was a lost battle in the war against slavery. The drama of the action in Harpers Ferry was a prelude to the coming of the Civil War. A far larger and more costly conflict loomed in the future. It would consume hundreds of thousands of lives and billions of dollars.

Much has been written about John Brown and not much about his raiders. What of that valiant vanguard of blacks that risked death in what pro-slavery people viewed as servile insurrection? Here is a brief summary of their fates.

Only Osborne Anderson escaped to write his story of what happened.

John Copeland, a white college student, and Shields Green, friend of Frederick Douglass, were executed, hanged separately by those who maintained "segregation at the gallows". Steward Taylor, shot at the Engine House (now named John Brown's Fort), died a slow and agonizing death. He begged to be killed to end his agony.