

THE LEWISTOWN RIOT

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

One often cringes at the word "riot" in this day and age, forgetting that riots preceded the good revolutions of history and were the forerunners of change that was important. Pennsylvanians look back historically at riots, remembering the Whiskey Rebellion, led by Pennsylvanians, the first action against this nation by its people in its history; the Fries Rebellion, which was the second such action and which also occurred in Pennsylvania. One remembers the Homestead Riot of a more recent day, and today, such actions on campus and in court which are anathema to most people, yet are not uncommon in the history of Pennsylvania. There was an action against the Court itself one time in Mifflin County--known as the Lewistown Riot--back before 1800. It appears--(as was the custom in that part of Central Pennsylvania--until only recently)--that an Associate Justice had been appointed to the Court. He was a Mr. Bryson, a resident of Mifflintown, and his appointment was quite unpopular, because earlier he had refused to commission two popular men as Colonels of their militia regiments. On the opening/<sup>day</sup>of court the news came that a large body of men had assembled along the narrows of the Juniata at a tavern, and they were going to throw the aforementioned Mr. Bryson off the bench bodily. The Sheriff of the County was dispatched to disperse the mob, but they captured the Sheriff. A court bailiff was told to meet the rioters, but they threatened to run him over. Men pressed pistols to each others breasts, drew swords upon one

another, but no one was struck. When they rushed into the courthouse, Judge Armstrong said bravely, "Since nothing else will do, let us defend the stairs". A man named Holt almost ran Judge Armstrong through with a sword. Again pistols and swords were drawn. Then it was suggested that three from each side meet to compromise the situation. And they almost did before some hot-head objected to the power of the Governor of the Commonwealth to make appointments. Finally, the rioters were asked through their representative if they would be satisfied and go home if Judge Bryson left the bench and did not sit on the Court. They agreed and pledged their mutual honor. The next day it was rumored that Bryson was again sitting on the court; the militia marched against the Courthouse; there was another imbroglio, the sheriff and Judge Bryson got into an argument and the Sheriff kicked the judge! The sheriff was jailed, the mob marched against the jail to release their former enemy the Sheriff; Judge Beale now refused to sit on the court with Judge Bryson. Finally the sheriff was released, the mob went home, and the Court adjourned. This all happened on September 12, 1791--what happened the next day I don't know--but isn't that enough for one riot--in one Pennsylvania story?

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.