

The 1842 Election in Northumberland County

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Documents

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On 27 December 1842, the polls were opened in Northumberland County for the first of the two so-called "Fighting Elections". John Ambrose Street, the defeated candidate at this election, called for a scrutiny of the votes cast for John T. Williston. This was refused by the sheriff, John M. Johnson, who on 24 January 1843 forwarded the following report to the Provincial Secretary, William F. Odell, describing how the election was conducted. After an investigation, a second election was held in 1843 which resulted in more violence and bloodshed. The report can be found in the Provincial Secretary's Letters, RG 2 RS 7, vol. 123, pp. 40 - 7, in the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.

W. A. SPRAY

In reply to your Circular of the 16th Instant addressed to me by order of his Excellency the Lieutenant Governor requiring of me a report of the manner in which the late Election was conducted under the Law in this County, I beg leave to state, That the Poll for the Election of two Members to represent this County was opened at the Court House in Newcastle on Tuesday the 27th December last at 9 o'clock when the following Gentlemen were proposed as Candidates viz. Alexander Rankin and John A. Street Esquires the former Members and John T. Williston a merchant in the town of Chatham. That during the whole day the Court House was crowded and the proceedings were conducted with as much order and regularity as could have been expected where so large a body of people were congregated. On this day 380 voters polled after going through the usual preliminaries.

The Poll opened at Negowack on the second day, a place about 25 miles below Newcastle on the north side of Miramichi Bay and there the whole of the voters were polled some hours before the usual time of closing and the conduct of the people in attendance was regular and orderly.

On Friday the third Days polling took place at a School House in Bay du Vin in the Williston Settlement wherein a considerable body of persons attended from Douglstown Newcastle and Chatham, and during the day considerable feeling was manifested by a portion of the populace and some difficulty was experienced, and there appeared to be some fear on the part of some of the Voters who were dubious of polling for Mr Street so much so that I believe some persons were deterred from voting.

On Saturday the fourth day's polling took place in a School House in a

central situation in the Town of Chatham where a great Body of people were together from different parties in the County; during this day a strong and decided local feeling was manifested. and persons who were known as Voters opposed to Mr Williston found difficulty in getting to the Poll in consequence of the passage being obstructed by the bulk of the people who were favorable to Mr Williston — the excitement became very warm towards the close of the day, one person had his coat torn off and two were ejected forcibly from the Building, others were deterred from fear of personal Violence from voting.

On the evening of this day the Windows and Doors of a number of persons residing in the Town of Chatham who either had voted against Mr Williston or who were known to be opposed to him were destroyed by a Mob who carried their unlawful designs into execution without resistance and who from their number were for the time uncontrollable.

On Monday the fifth days polling took place at Cuppage's in the North West. and here I found in attendance on the Poll a large Body of persons principally of the laboring class from Chatham and a large body of persons were also in attendance from Newcastle and other places, whose presence was not required but who certainly were there as partizans of the respective Candidates: here some difficulty was experienced in keeping the passage to the Poll clear, the partizans on each side being desirous of having it in command. I was obliged to abandon the Door for a time and take one or two Votes at a window near. I however, after some little time and altercation with one of the Magistrates, returned to the Door and I believe all the Voters present polled. Considerable scuffling took place and some violence was reported to have taken place but nothing of the kind came under my observation.

On Tuesday the 6th Days polling took place at the School House opposite the Episcopal Church near McLaggan's Mill on the South West, where I found the same body of men in attendance from Chatham, Newcastle and elsewhere — during this day the excitement was very great, several persons were beaten, voters were intimidated by the partizans of Mr Williston and the threats of the Mob to Mr Street one of the Candidates and their Violence leads me to believe that he would have suffered personal injury at their hands had he left the Building in which the polling was conducted, as he wished, prior to the close. — on the whole the proceedings of this day may be characferized as lawless and riotous. — at the close of the poll the candidates arranged among themselves that all the following on both sides should return to their homes with the exception of 8 persons to attend each Candidate and on Wednesday the 7th days polling was conducted at the School House near Doaks in Blissfield, in a quiet and orderly manner, in consequence no doubt of the absence of the exciting cause.

On my return to Newcastle on Thursday I found that the Magistrates ap-

prehending that serious disturbances would take place on Friday the day on which the poll was to be closed at Newcastle had called official Sessions for the purpose of appointing a body of respectable individuals to act as Special Constables under the direction of the Magistracy.

On Friday Morning the 6th Instant I was at the Court House at 9 o'clock ready to open the poll, but prior to the time of my arrival a large Body of people from Chatham, Douglas Town and elsewhere were congregated in front of the Court House, and delayed opening the Poll till I could arrange to take the Votes at the entrance of the Building and thereby prevent confusion and rioting in the Building till about 10 o'clock when the poll was opened, meantime the Special Constables were arriving with short Batons and Badges to distinguish them from others, the whole of these as they came up were set upon by the followers of Mr Williston and deprived of their Batons and Badges — the concourse of persons in attendance was very great and a determination was early manifested by the supporters of Mr Williston to obstruct the passage and prevent Voters opposed to him from voting, several persons were beaten, many Voters made repeated attempts to get through the Mob to the poll, but were as often jostled back, and the persons engaged in thus obstructing the passage were numerous and appeared so well to understand each other and were so determined to have their own way at all hazard that all the efforts of the Magistrates, Constables and peaceably disposed part of the assembly were by them rendered perfectly futile.

As the time for closing the poll approached the tumultuous conduct of the Mob was now violent. Mr Rankin one of the Candidates made several attempts to bring up Voters through the Crowd but he and they were as often driven back. — a little after one o'clock P.M. Mr Street handed me a list of Voters who he said were in attendance as near the poll as they could get, desirous of polling for him and Mr Rankin, and shortly after this Mr Street tendered me a written protest against the proceedings in consequence of his Voters being excluded from the Poll by the Mob. — Some of his Voters did after this vote.

At ten minutes past 2 o'clock Mr Street handed me a written document to which was affixed the Signatures of 47 Persons and addressed to me, in which they stated that they were then in attendance and near the Poll but were prevented from reaching it by the Mob, and demanded to be admitted to the Poll to give their Votes for Mr Rankin and Mr Street. I had no power at my command capable of clearing a passage and allowing free access to the Poll at any time during the day but the passage was kept clear whenever it was so ordered by one or two active individuals.

After the time that the demand was given to me, sufficient time remained for 50 or 60 Voters to have polled before the hour of 3 o'clock, when it was finally closed and but a very few votes were afterwards polled.

When the hour of 3 o'clock arrived I declared the state of the Poll, where-

upon Mr Street demanded a Scrutiny of the votes polled for Mr Williston which I took time to consider of.

On the following day a similar demand was made by a number of Freeholders who had polled for Mr Street and on Monday the 9th Instant after hearing Counsel on both sides, I declined going into a Scrutiny from a conviction on my mind that it could not be gone through with by the 14th when the writ was returnable.

I much regret to say that throughout the whole of the Election there has been a strong religious feeling evinced — Mr Street having been charged by some of the people with having insulted or offended one of the Priests who lately came here. whilst travelling together.

This has been made use of by artful and designing men not only for Electioneering purposes but I fear for raising themselves into importance with the lower orders and by committing Violence upon persons and property, rendering the Civil power insufficient for the purposes intended.

The destruction of property in Chatham has not perhaps exceeded £150 but the injury to the feelings and the effects upon the public mind is such that many consider their persons not safe and their property of much less value and very insecure.