

Letter from William Shepard to James Bowdoin, January 26, 1787

Springfield Jan.^y 26. 1787

Sir,

The unhappy time is come in which we have been obliged to shed blood. Shays, who was at the head of about twelve hundred men, marched yesterday afternoon about four o'clock, towards the public buildings in battle array. He marched his men in an open column by platoons. I sent several times by one of my aids, & two gentlemen, Captains Buffington & Woodbridge, to him to know what he was after, or what he wanted. His reply was, he wanted barracks, & barracks he would have & Stores. The answer returned was he must purchase them dear?, if he had them. He still proceeded on his march until he approached within two hundred & fifty yards of the arsenal. He then made a halt. I immediately sent Major Lyman, one of my aids, & Capt Buffington to inform him not to march his troops any nearer the Arsenal on his peril, as I was stationed here by order of your Excellency & the Secretary of War, for the defence of the public property, in case he did I should surely fire on him & his men. A Mr Wheeler, who appeared to be one of Shays' aids, met Mr. Lyman, after he had delivered my order in the most peremptory manner, & made answer, that that was all he wanted. Mr. Lyman returned with his answer. Shays immediately put his troops in motion, & marched on rapidly near one hundred yards. I then ordered Major Stephens, who commanded the Artillery, to fire upon them. He accordingly did. The two first shott he endeavoured to overshoot them, in hopes they would have taken warning without firing among them, but it had no effect on them. Major Stephens then directed his shot thro' the center of his column. The fourth or fifth shot put their whole column into the utmost confusion. Shays made an attempt to display the column, but in vain. We had one howitz which was loaded with grape shot, which when fired, gave them great uneasiness. Had I been disposed to destroy them, I might have charged upon their rear & flanks with my Infantry & the two field pieces & could have killed the greater part of his whole army within twenty five minutes. There was not a single musket fired on either side. I found three

men dead on the the spot & one wounded, who is since dead. One of our Artillery men by inattention was badly wounded. Three muskets were taken up with the dead, which were all deeply loaded. I inclose to your excellency a copy of a paper sent to me last evening. I have received no reinforcement yet, & expect to be attacked this day by their whole force combined.

I am Sir, with great respect, Your Excellency's most obedient & hble Servt.

W^m Shepard

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