

The *Chesapeake* Affair

The excitement in the city on Saturday last exceeded anything witnessed here for some time. It was only during the morning of that day that the fact became generally known that three men had been illegally seized by the officers of the Federal gunboats in port, and that they were to be publicly delivered up to the authorities here in compliance with a demand made by the Government. As the morning advanced, the whole circumstances connected with the outrage became more fully known, that one of the men had been taken forcibly from a British vessel at Sambro, -- that the other two were respectable young men belonging to the city, engineers, who had been engaged a day or two before to go on board the *Chesapeake* -- that an attempt had been made to carry them off to the States, -- and that after bringing them into this port all knowledge of the circumstances had been carefully concealed from the authorities until the friends of the two young men alluded to had brought the fact to their notice with a view to their release.

We shall give a statement of the facts as they have been developed, in a shape not to be disputed. At the time the steamer was seized by the Federals, she was taking in coal from a schooner alongside, in Sambro harbour. Her recent captors, with the exception of Braine, who was not present, were sitting down to breakfast when the Federal gunboat *Ella and Anna* hove in sight and at once bore down upon them. The crew waited until she came pretty near and then sought safety on shore, leaving on board the two young men from Halifax and the two engineers who were on board the steamer at the time of her capture by the Confederates. These latter, immediately the other left, hoisted the flag of distress, but not before the gunboat was within one hundred yards of the *Chesapeake*. The latter was instantly boarded by the Federals, when the two young men from Halifax were seized and put in irons. The coal schooner alongside was next boarded and searched, where they found Wade, one of Braine's men, who was ill. Having seized this man also, they carried him off, with several trunks found on board the schooner, and then taking possession of the *Chesapeake* the two steamers proceeded out until they were met by the Federal steamer *Dacotah*, the captain of which is senior in command to the captain of the other gunboat. The three entered Halifax harbour together on the afternoon of the same day (Thursday last).

No steps were taken by the Federal officers to report the matter to the authorities here, until at length, a demand was forwarded to the officer in command, to state the names of the ships under his command -- the object of their visit, and the circumstances under which the steamer *Chesapeake* had been taken out of the harbour of Sambro and brought here by men-of-war belonging to the United States navy. We have already given the substance of the official report from the Captain of the *Dacotah*; that the gunboat had been attracted to the *Chesapeake* by a flag of distress, (a statement which was not in accordance with the facts, as the flag was not raised until the gunboat was within a musket shot of the latter,) -- and that they had found on board five of her old crew --

studiously concealing the fact, both in this written communication and also during a personal interview with the authorities, that three of these men, who were reported as a portion of her old crew before she was captured by the Confederates, were at that moment confined in irons on board one of the gunboats. It was only in the course of the next day that the fact was brought to the notice of the authorities that a man had been forcibly taken from a British schooner in a British port, and was illegally held a prisoner on board one of these vessels, together with two other men; whereupon, Comr. Cleary, of the *Dacotah*, was promptly notified, that no U.S. man-of-war could be permitted to leave the port until the matter was investigated; and in a short time his answer was received that he would hand over the prisoners to the authorities.

He was then informed that the High Sheriff of Halifax, J.J. Sawyer, Esq, would be in attendance on the Queen's wharf at one o'clock the next day (Saturday) to receive the men; and was also notified that at two o'clock of the same day, Capt. O'Brien, of the Revenue schr. *Daring*, would take formal charge of the steamer *Chesapeake*, on behalf of the Queen's Representative.

On Saturday forenoon a letter was sent to the Government by Commander Cleary, transmitting the correspondence between Lord Lyons and the Hon. Mr. Steward, and inquiring if any change would take place in the determination of the Government here. It was replied that his Honour the Administrator saw no ground on which to change his decision previously communicated.

Accordingly, the *Chesapeake* was delivered over to Captain O'Brien at two o'clock; and at about half-past one a boat arrived from the *Ella and Anna* with the three men. They were marched up the slip closely guarded and handcuffed, in which condition the High Sheriff refused to receive them, when the irons were removed by the officer in charge, and the Sheriff, after reading the necessary documents pronounced the men free. Immediately following this proceeding a scene occurred, which, as it is the subject of a good deal of comment, and caused a great deal of excitement, we shall describe particularly.

During the proceedings, no one gave any attention to a boat which tossed about in the chop at the slip, in which sat two men who might have been attracted to the spot from the fish-market slip just opposite. The moment the Sheriff pronounced the men free, a gentleman who had placed himself during the reading of the documents, close beside Wade, told the latter to jump into the boat, and before anybody could realize what was going on the boat was two or three lengths of herself from the wharf. At this instant a policeman dashed through the crowd and shouted to the men in the boat to stop or he would shoot them dead, at the same time drawing a pistol from his pocket. Two or three gentlemen interfered and obstructed the policeman, and the boat, with Wade in it, escaped.

The U.S. Vice-Consul had, it appears, applied for and received from the Government a Preliminary Warrant in the course of the morning, under the extradition treaty, and the Chief Justice, who had issued the previous warrant against Brafoe, having withdrawn the warrant upon the ground that the Imperial act required a Justice of the Peace to act in such cases and not a Judge of the Supreme Court, the Mayor was applied to and, upon the proper depositions being made by some of the original crew of the *Chesapeake*, granted a warrant against Wade, which had been placed in the hands of the City Marshal to serve. The officer entrusted with that duty had, we are informed, been instructed by the Vice-Consul to allow Wade to walk about to show that he was free, after his liberation by the Government command, previous to making the arrest. Having no idea of any attempt to escape by water, the attention of the officer was not directed to that point until Wade was beyond his reach.

Source: *The British Colonist* (Halifax: December 22, 1863).