

This file contains notes made when reading the Book of Negroes.

BHQP, #7417, Reel M-361

Carleton to R.R. Livingston, 14 Apr. 1783

(Minister of Foreign Affairs)

"As I observe that in the 7th Article of the provisional treaty, it is agreed...that `His Britanic (sic) Majesty shall, with all convenient speed, and without casuing any destruction, or carrying away any negroes or other property of the American inhabitants, withdraw all his Armies, Garrisons, and Fleets from the United States, and from every Port, Place, and Harbour, within the same, etc.', and as Embarkations of persons and property are on the point of being made, I am to request that Congress would be pleased to empower any person or persons, on behalf of the United States, to be present at New York, and to assist such persons as shall be appointed by me, to inspect and Superintend all Embarkations which the condition of the Evacuation of this place may require, and that they will be pleased to represent to me every infraction of the letter or spirit of the treaty that redress may be immediately ordered."

BHQP, #7419, Reel M-361

John Harbeck to Carleton, 14 Apr. 1783

Memorial, seeking assistance to secure a negro which he claims as his property.

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BHQP, #7448, Reel M-361

Benjamin Harrison to Carleton, 18 Apr. 1783

(Gov. of Virginia)

Has granted a passport to Mr. Hugh Walker to go to New York in search of such negroes as he may have authority to bring back. If Carleton is of opinion that the negroes are to be returned to their owners, begs him to order some of his officers to assist Mr. Walker.

BHQP, #7428, Reel M-361

Resolutions of Congress, 15 Apr. 1783

Resolved that General Washington be instructed to make proper arrangements with Carleton for receiving possession of the posts in the United States occupied by British troops, and for obtaining the delivery of all negroes and other property of the inhabitants of the United States in the possession of the British forces or adherents of the British cause.

BHQP, #7482, Reel M-361

Washington to Gov. Clinton (sic, should be Carleton), 21 Apr. 1783.

Encloses a copy of the Resolutions of Congress.

Most of letter deals with arrangements for the exchange of prisoners.

Proposes a personal interview with Carleton to discuss the other subjects contained in the Resolutions [ie. the return of the posts and the question of negroes and other American property].

BHQP, #7637, Reel M-362

Washington to Carleton, Orange Town, 6 May 1783

Says that in his letter to Carleton of 21 Apr. 1783 he enclosed a copy of the Resolutions of Congress, 15 Apr. 1783. Notes that he had the honour to propose a personal interview with Carleton to discuss the matter of taking possession of the posts and the matter of the carrying away of any Negroes or other property belonging to the American inhabitants, and to agree upon measures for carrying into effect those two points of the 7th Article of the Treaty according to their true spirit and intent.

Mentions that he had this day been favoured with a personal conference. During this conversation he took occasion to inform Carleton that in consequence of Carleton's letter to Livingston [14 Apr. 1783], Congress directed him to take such measures as were necessary to carry into effect the matters mentioned therein.

"In the course of our Conference on this subject, I was surprised to hear you mention that an Embarkation had already taken place, in which a large Number of Negroes had been carried away. Whether this conduct is consonant or not to, or how far it may deemed an Infraction of the Treaty, is not for me to decide. I cannot, however, conceal from your Excellency, that my private opinion is that the measure is totally different from the Letter & Spirit of the Treaty."

BHQP, #7666, Reel M-362

Carleton to Washington, 12 May 1783

Says an embarkation was much advanced even prior to official word of the peace. This fleet sailed for Nova Scotia on 27 Apr.

Notes that he wrote to Minister of Foreign Affairs to request Congress empower someone to assist such persons as he should appoint to inspect and superintend embarkations at New York.

In the meantime, to prevent abuse or delay, and until he learned Congress's answer, he requested Daniel Parker and Major Hopkins to undertake the task.

Encloses copy of order he gave to prevent carrying away of negroes and other American property. Says he understands from the persons therein named that they visited the April 27 fleet and ordered on shore whatever came under the above description.

"There appeared to be but little difference of opinion except in the case of negroes who had been declared free previous to my arrival. As I had no right to deprive them of that liberty I found them possessed of, an accurate register was taken of every circumstance respecting them, so as to serve as a record of the name of the original proprietor of the negro, and as a rule by which to judge of his value. By this open method of conducting the business, I hoped to prevent all fraud, and whatever might admit of different constructions is left open for future explanation or compensation." He says that if these negroes had been denied permission to embark, they would have found some other way of getting away, so the former owner would have had no way to trace them and no chance of compensation.

Since this business was carried on in a public manner, and the orders were published in the Gazette, he had no reason to think that either the embarkation or the circumstances surrounding it might have come as a surprise to Washington at their May 6 meeting.

Expresses concern that Washington regarded the embarkation as not in keeping with the letter and spirit of the treaty. Reiterates that he found the negroes in question free upon his arrival at New York, and that he felt he had no right to prevent them going anywhere they chose.

Says that every negro's name is registered, the master he formerly belonged to, and such other circumstances as serve to denote his value, that it may be adjusted by compensation.

BHQP, #8668, Reel M-364

North to Carleton, 8 Aug. 1783

"The Removal of the Negroes whom you found in the possession of their Freedom upon your arrival at New York, and who are desirous of leaving that Place, is certainly an Act of Justice due to them from Us; nor do I see that the Removal of the Negroes, who had been made free before the Execution of the Preliminaries of Peace, can be deemed any Infraction of the Treaty. It was, however, a very proper precaution to have a correct List of the said Negroes taken, and their respective Values ascertained."