

HORRID MURDER AND PIRACY  
ON BOARD THE  
SCHOONER ELIZA OF PHILADELPHIA

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BY CAPTAIN WHELAND

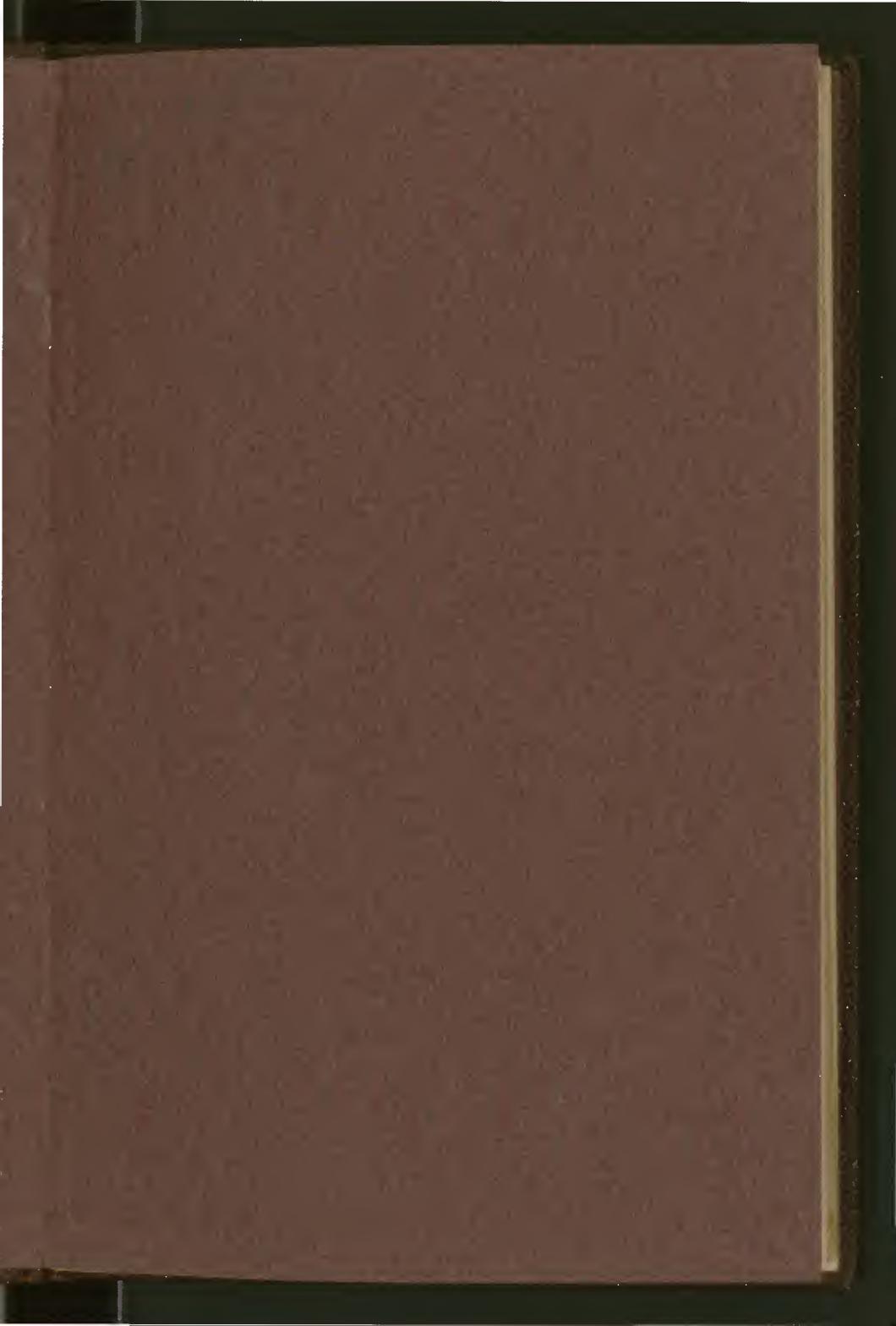
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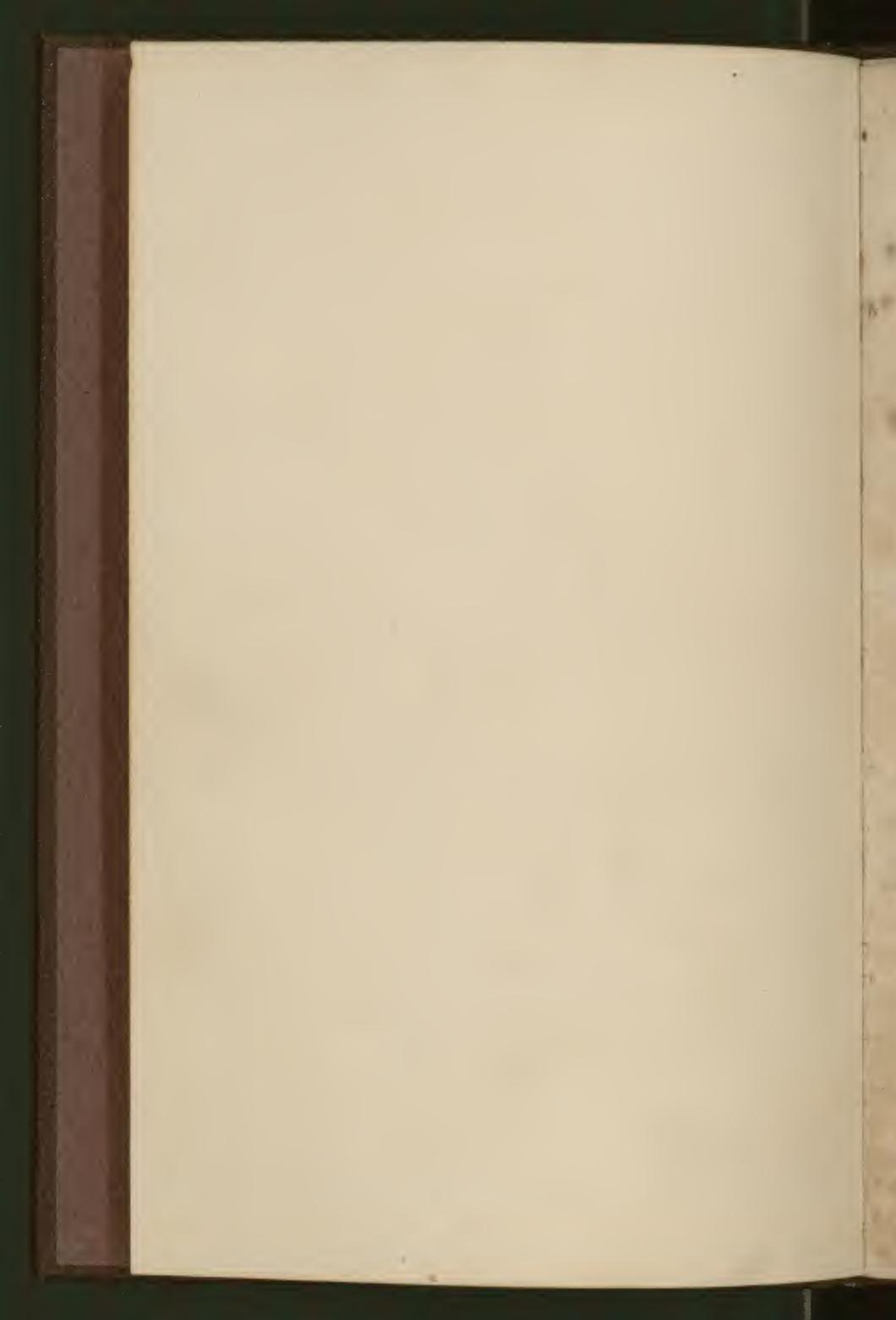
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*Don't know*

A NARRATIVE

OF THE

*Horrid Murder & Piracy*

COMMITTED ON BOARD THE

SCHOONER ELIZA, OF PHILADELPHIA,

ON THE HIGH SEAS,

BY THREE FOREIGNERS,

*Who were tried before the Circuit Court of the United States, on Monday, the 21st April, 1800;*

TOGETHER WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE

SURPRIZING RECAPTURE

OF THE SAID SCHOONER,

*Walden*

BY CAPTAIN WHELAND,

The only person who escaped from their Barbarity.

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# NARRATIVE

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## A VOYAGE FROM PHILADELPHIA TO ST. BARTHOLOMEWS.

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*BY WILLIAM WHELAND.*

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**O**N the 27th day of August, 1799, I set sail from the port of Philadelphia, on board the schooner *Eliza*, bound for St. Thomas's: American seamen being at that time very hard to be obtained, I was under the necessity of shipping three foreigners; so that my crew consisted of two Americans, Thomas Croft, (whom I afterwards appointed mate,) and Jacob Sufter, together with the three foreigners, who entered with me by the names of Joseph Baker, Joseph Brous and Peter Peterson. The name of our supercargo was Charles Rey, a French gentleman, who had long resided in the island of St. Domingo, and had borne the commission of general in the armies of his Catholic majesty, previous to the revolution; but, like many others of his unfortunate countrymen, was under the necessity of seeking an asylum in America,

when the Negroes had seized upon the government of that island.

In this country he married an amiable young lady, of Baltimore, of French extraction, with whom he lived in the most perfect state of conjugal felicity, and by whom he had one child. He occasionally resided at Philadelphia and Baltimore ; in both of which places, he had endeared himself to a numerous circle of acquaintance, by the cheerfulness of his conversation and the suavity of his manners : his fortunes, however, began to be considerably impaired, by disappointments in his remittances from St. Domingo, and other real losses to a great amount ; he resolved, therefore, to go out supercargo, with a view of regaining, if possible, some part of his immense property in the island, and to provide for a beloved wife and encreasing family.

Neither Mr. Rey nor myself had a good opinion of the three foreigners. They seemed to us to be men of an implacable and revengeful spirit ; for, soon after we had sailed, in going down the river, one of them, Peterfon, alias Louis Lacroix, having refused to obey the orders of the mate, I struck him ; on seeing this, Baker came to his assistance, and Mr. Rey stepped forward to protect me ; when I had given Baker a good beating, they both promised to do their duty like good men, if I would forgive them, which I immediately

promised to do ; after which they behaved themselves for 14 days very well, and there was no more dispute until the 12th of September, being in latitude 28, 30, N. and in longitude 60, 00, W. At about 10 o'clock, P. M. it being the mate's watch on deck, Mr. Rey and myself had gone to sleep in our births, one on each side of the cabin. It appears that the three desperadoes, Baker, Brous and Peterson, availed themselves of an opportunity, while the mate was a-sleep on deck, to give him a blow on the head with an axe ; but, as no person was on deck at that time, except the mate and the three ruffians, a circumstantial account of the murder of the mate cannot be obtained. Certain it is, however, that he was murdered and thrown over-board. By their account afterwards to me, Brous is said to have given him the first blow, and Baker, alias Boulanger, the second, which finished his existence ; but, by their confession in Philadelphia, before judge Peters, it is said, that the mate and Brous, having some quarrel, and Brous declaring himself the master of the vessel, and the mate his prisoner of war, the mate struck him, which caused Brous, alias Berouce, in his own defence, to lift up an axe, and give him a blow on the head : This was a bad plea of self-defence, as the mate was obviously justified in striking a man who acknowledged his intention of turning pirate, and taking the vessel.

As soon as Thomas Croft, the mate, was dispatched, and while he lay lifeless on the deck, they entered the cabin, and, approaching the berth where I lay asleep, one of them struck me one blow over the head, and another over the arm, with an axe, and immediately I received a stab in the arm with a sword. Upon which, I sprung up, and seized my pistols, which were under my head; at the same time, Charles Rey, awaking from his sleep by the noise which this circumstance occasioned, jumped out of his berth, and cried out in French, what is the matter? And seeing that I was assailed by the three villains, by the blood on my face and arm, he snatched a pistol suddenly from my hand, and turning upon them, they retreated from the cabin; but, in his attempt to follow them, he received a severe blow over the head with the pump brake, which laid him on the cabin floor; however, in the course of half an hour, he attempted a second time to go on deck, and was knocked down, as they supposed dead, but still he had remains of life; but, as it was dark, neither of us durst make a second attempt to go up from the cabin, thro' fear of meeting with a similar reception. No words can describe the horrors of my situation for nearly half an hour: my wounds were extremely painful, and I was almost covered with blood, while Mr. Rey seemed a little delirious from the blow he had received on his head, and I expected

every moment to be overpowered by the ruffians, and finally murdered. We were in this situation, when Mr. Rey, seeing light on deck, sprung up in a fit of desperation to make a second effort, when he received another mortal blow on the head.

Thinking that my generous friend, Mr. Rey, was murdered, and seeing myself covered with blood, I wrenched the pistol, with some difficulty from his dying-grasp, and putting myself in a posture of defence, I begged they would spare my life. Not knowing, at that moment, that the mate was murdered, I imagined the whole crew had risen against me, until those murderers informed me, that all, except myself, were killed,—bidding me come on deck, which I refused, as I was apprehensive that if I did, I should be immediately murdered. They then ordered me to hand them up liquor, which I was incapable of doing, on account of the wounds which I had already received; nevertheless, as they saw me armed with pistols, they were afraid of entering the cabin. A kind of parley then took place betwixt us, in which it was agreed, that I should navigate the vessel to the Spanish Main, on condition that they would spare my life. Under an assurance of sparing their lives, they entered the cabin, supplied themselves with liquor, and removed Mr. Rey upon deck: he was still in life; but it was impossible, even with medical aid, that he could have recovered. He

appeared insensible to every thing that was going forward after his last fatal wound. These monsters, eager to finish the diabolical work they had begun, hastened to throw him over-board, although there was evident signs of life. But these wretches were not yet satiated with blood. Jacob Sufter, the remaining seaman, who had not joined in the conspiracy, and who had been asleep in the fore-castle during this scene of horror, was now called aft, under a pretence that I wanted him ; but, no sooner had he advanced within reach of these wretches, than he was knocked down with an axe, and immediately thrown into the sea. At that time we had light winds, and the vessel was making very little way, so that I could distinctly hear his groans for at least eight or ten minutes.

Jacob Sufter was not known to me previous to his entering on board the schooner ; but, from his shipment to the hour of his death, his behaviour was that of a good and faithful seaman. He was born in Germantown, in the state of Pennsylvania, where his parents, I am informed, now reside.

When these villains had finished their work of murder, and conscious of their own incapacity to navigate the vessel, they came into the cabin, and dressed my wounds : they then proceeded to wash off the blood from the floor of the cabin and from

the deck, which, when they had finished, they began, as soon as morning appeared, to pillage the property of the deceased.

When day-light appeared, and perceiving that they considered their own safety to depend upon my knowledge of navigation, I began to have some hopes that my life would be spared, and even that the vessel might be regained; but, tho' I found my pistols serviceable to me in keeping them off, I was apprehensive, that, in case of another conflict, they might be used against myself; I, therefore, threw my pistols overboard secretly,—a circumstance which they never found out; for they always understood that I had them in my possession.

In this situation, in mutual fear of each other, we proceeded as they supposed towards the Spanish Main, but in this I deceived them, by telling them that a strong current set in to the westward, and that we must keep a more easterly course, which we did, but without discovering a sail. During this time, though the weather was generally moderate, the sails and rigging not being well trimmed, received considerable damage; for, I was not capable of handling a rope myself, and they were not under my subjection or orders; besides, when my arm, which I had constantly kept in a sling, began to grow better, I endeavoured to conceal it as much as possible from them, thinking that my se-

curity consisted, in a great measure, on their ideas of my weakness. In the mean while, their principal occupation was in rifling the vessel, breaking open packages, in search of any thing valuable, or for barrels of hams or other provisions; whilst I was on the watch for an opportunity to overcome them, and get possession of the vessel.

This opportunity presented on the 21st September, on the ninth day after the murderers had got possession of the vessel. Two of them, Peterson, alias La Croix, and Baker, alias Boulanger, went down the fore-scuttle to bring up some hams, while Brous was stooping down to make a fire in the cabouss; I immediately seized a club that lay near me, with my left hand, my right being still in a sling, and gave Brous a severe blow on the back of the head, which laid him flat on the deck; I attempted a second blow, but missed him. Mr. Rey's bull-dog seeing me engaged, flew, barking to my assistance, which so much deterred Brous from turning upon me, that he run aft, and got up the shrouds; I immediately snatched up an axe, and ran to the fore-scuttle, slipping my arm from the sling, and forgetting my wounds, lifted up the axe, as in act to strike the two that were there, and whose heads were then above the deck, attempting to come out; but the moment they saw the axe over their heads, they sunk down into the hold, and I

instantly shut the skuttle over them; and, to make it more secure, I dragged a large anchor from the bow, by means of a rope round the windlass, and laid it over the skuttle.

Having now Peterfon and Baker secured, I proceeded to Brous, who was on the shrouds; at first he had no intention of yielding, but cried out to his companions that they might come aft into the cabin, and proceed that way to his assistance, while those below were vociferating loudly to him; but, being in French, I did not perfectly understand.

But, when Brous saw himself entirely at my mercy, he supplicated with great earnestness, that I would spare his life, which I promised to do, on condition that he would come down and submit himself to be confined, and behave in every respect as I directed him. He was some time before he could be persuaded to believe that I would spare him: However, on my further assurances, he was prevailed on to come down; as soon as he was on deck, he fell on his knees, took me by the hand, and kissed it several times, making, at the same time, the most solemn protestations of submission. I then ordered him to put his hands behind him, that I might tie them, which he instantly complied with; I then got a chain, and chained him upon deck to the ring-bolts. Brous being thus secured, I set about taking the necessary precau-

tions for preserving what I had gained; I, therefore, went into the cabin, and brought up biscuit and other provisions, together with my quadrant, books, &c. and secured the cabin, lest they might force a passage that way.

I now saw that I had an arduous task to accomplish, to navigate a schooner alone, and to watch my prisoners; from whom (if they had accomplished their intents) I could expect no mercy; but, when I compared it with what I had already suffered, it appeared a pleasure. The most difficult part I thought was over, and that I had only to suffer some privations, to trust to the protection of the Almighty, and my own vigilance. When I regained possession of the schooner, I found myself in latitude 25 deg. North, and in longitude 60 deg. West. My prisoners below had plenty of provisions; but they were in darkness, and had no water. To prevent them making any attempts to regain their liberty, I did not think it proper to drive them to desperation; but to show them that I was willing to let them live, and enjoy as many comforts as was consistent with my own safety: I burnt a hole with a spike, in the fore-scuttle, through which I could pour water and other refreshments; so that, after several attempts to break through, and believing that I had killed Brous, and thrown him overboard, they desisted, and seemed to submit to

their fate. As for Broué, who was on deck, I suffered him, at meal times, to have the partial use of his limbs, to change his position, &c. but I would by no means suffer him to speak aloud, or be for a moment totally unfettered; for, my greatest fears were from his getting loose, and suddenly surprising me, while I was in a slumber; for, I never lay down, or had any profound sleep while they were under my charge.

On the 4th of October, being thirteen days after the recapture of the vessel, Providence during all that time having blessed me with favourable weather, except one gale, which lasted twenty-four hours, I discovered the island of St. Bartholomew's, and at 7, P. M. was off the harbour; and, by the assistance of a Swedish schooner, anchored to the leeward of the harbour, and at 10, P. M. John Peterson, Esq. commander of his Swedish majesty's brig Housare, sent his barge, with two officers and ten men, to my assistance, in which he was joined by A. Campbell, Esq; commander of the United States brig Eagle, and, on the 5th instant, anchored safe in port; and after being moored, I landed, and entered a protest against the prisoners, for murder and piracy, with Job Wall, Esq; consul for the United States of America, who had the murderers put in irons, on board of the aforesaid United States brig Eagle,

with orders to be delivered up to Thomas Tingey, Esq; commander of the United States ship *Ganges*, and commodore of the leeward station.

After delivering up my prisoners to captain Campbell, I was politely treated by the merchants and other inhabitants of the island; but, the government made a claim of salvage, for the assistance the Swedish brig had given me, in bringing the vessel to her anchorage. However, I resisted the claim thus set up, and showed that it was contrary to the treaty with Sweden; but was obliged to pay two hundred dollars to the sailors of the Swedish brig for their assistance. Soon after I sold my cargo, and purchased another of sugars, and having hired fresh hands, I sailed from St. Bartholomew's on the 4th November, and arrived at Gloucester-Point the 25th of the same month.

When the prisoners were brought to Philadelphia, they underwent an examination before judge Peters, in which they confessed the piracy and murder, differing very little in the detail of the circumstances from the foregoing narrative: The plea which they set up in their defence was, that they were French prisoners, and in the service of the French Republic: That one of them, Brous, alias La Roche, bore a commission under that government, and therefore they had a right to make

prize of an American vessel, and to kill any person that resisted the attempt. But, the judge having considered that they entered voluntarily into the American service, objected to their plea, and ordered them to prison for trial. Peterfon, alias La Croix, has not the least appearance of being a Frenchman, though he speaks bad French, having been probably on board a French ship, and it is more likely that he is a Dane or a Swede. As for Boulanger, alias Baker, we have good authority to say, that he is a Canadian, that he was born at Les-troi-riviers, of a creditable family, and was a soldier in a regiment called the Royal Canadians, in the service of his Britannic majesty, from which he deserted in the spring of 1799, and came into New-York state, by the way of Lake Champlain; so that it is not probable that he was ever in the service of France, or at sea before this fatal voyage. And it is highly probable that Brous, alias La Roche, is also a Canadian.

Their trial came on in the circuit court of the United States, before judges Chase and Peters, on Monday, the 21st April; they having for council, Messrs. Dallas, Moylan and Duponceau; the only evidence against them was myself, and their hardened conduct; and judge Peters, who was called upon to give the substance of their examination

before him, previous to their commitment for trial, the jury, after retiring a short time, brought in the verdict of **GUILTY**.

*Sentences of Death was passed upon them on Friday, the 25th April, and they are ordered for Execution on the 9th May.*

I thought it my duty, not only from repeated solicitations, but that I might be relieved from numerous verbal narrations, to send this to Mr. Folwell's press. I have no emolument in its publication; and so far from setting down "ought in malice," I forgive them, as they are my fellow-creatures; but they must abide by the lenient laws of my country; and hope their God, who is my God, will be merciful.

**WILLIAM WHELAND.**

Philadelphia, April 27, 1800.



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