

THE DYING DECLARATION OF JAMES BUCHANAN, EZRA ROSS, AND WILLIAM BROOKS, Who were executed at Worcester, July 2, 1778; FOR THE MURDER OF Mr. Joshua Spooner.

ON February 8th, 1778, we, *James Buchanan* and *William Brooks* left Worcester with an intent to go to Springfield to work. In passing Mr. Spooner's we were called in by *Alexander Cummings*, who we thought was a British soldier. Having stood some time by the fire, he told us his master was gone from home, but he would go and call his mistress, for she had a great regard for the army, as her father was in it and one of her brothers. He called her, and she came down, and appeared glad to see us. She asked us whether we came from the Hill?

We told her we did, and were going to *Canada*, as I, *Buchanan*, had left my family there. She ordered Breakfast for us, and as soon as it was ready we were desired to go into the sitting-room. We were very much surprised at this, for we should have thought ourselves well dealt by to have received any favours she might see fit to bestow on us in the kitchen.

However, we all breakfasted together. The weather being very bad, we were asked to stay till it cleared up. As we had but little money, we accordingly stayed. The weather continued very bad, we stayed there that day and night. I (*Buchanan*) am not positive whether it was the first or second day, when by ourselves, that she and her husband did not - that he was gone a journey to Princetown, and that he would not be home soon—that we should not go from thence until the weather was fair, there being a great fall of snow at this time.

We very readily consented, and stayed from day to day, expecting Mr. Spooner home. Mrs. Spooner getting very free in discourse with me (*Buchanan*) one day told me that she never expected Mr. Spooner to return, as there was one Mr. Ross gone with him, who had an ounce of Poison, which he had promised her he would give to Mr. Spooner the first convenient opportunity.

The reader must needs think this a very strange circumstance, that she should make such a discovery to an entire stranger. She said at the same time, we should stay till we saw whether Mr. Spooner returned or not.

Accordingly we stayed, and were never in better quarters, little thinking of the bait the seducer of souls was laying for us; we were then in a disposition to catch at it, having no fear of God before our eyes, and being entirely forsaken of him.

Having tarried ten or eleven days as nearly as can be recollected, her husband came home, and seeing us there asked her who we were. She told him that I (*Buchanan*) was cousin to *Alexander Cummings*. He took no further notice of it, but going out among his neighbours, it is likely he was informed how long we had been there, and probably heard at the tavern, of the quantity of liquor he had to pay for, since his going on his journey. Be that as it may, at night he came home, and seeing we were not gone, he desired us to go immediately. We begg'd he would let us stay till morning. He after some time consented that we should stay by the fire all night. He was in the sitting-room by himself, and Mrs.

Spooner went to bed.

There was one *Reuben Old* came upon some business with Mr. Spooner, and after some time came out and told us that Mr. Spooner told him he was afraid we should rob him, adding that he had lost a silver spoon, and a great deal of pewter. This vexed us, as we were conscious we had no thought of stealing from him. Had we been so inclined, we had as much opportunity as we could have desired. The spoon he found where he laid it, and Cummings convinced him there was none of the pewter missing.

Mr. Spooner went up stairs and brought down a box, which he had his money in, and laid down on the floor with it under his head. Every thing Mr. Spooner did or said, *Old* came and told us, and was with us all the time he was asleep, and we were all merry together, sitting by the kitchen fire. Said *Old* declared in court, that I, *Buchanan*, said if Mr. Spooner came out, I would for two coppers put him into the Well, which is false. In the morning, it not being convenient to see Mrs. Spooner, to take our leave of her, we, *Buchanan*, *Brooks* and *Cummings* went to Mrs. Stratten's to pass the day, till we could get an opportunity to bid Mrs. Spooner farewell.

We stayed at Mrs. Stratten's the best part of the day, Cummings having received five dollars from Mr. Spooner, to treat his pretended cousin with, we went to Mr. Cooley's tavern and had some drink, from thence to Doctor Foxcroft's, stayed there until Cummings came and told as Mr. Spooner was in bed. We then went to the house, and had supper and liquor, retired to the barn and tarried all night.

In the morning had breakfast sent to the barn for us. And as Mrs. Berry and Mrs. Tufts had been there the day before and wanted to see me, (*Buchanan*) I said I would go and see them. Mrs. Spooner said she would also go, which was agreed on. *Buchanan* and *Brooks* went there, and, we all stayed at Mr. Green's, drinking until late; some distance from thence, she said she had given a handkerchief to a British soldier that had some words in anger with me, *Buchanan*, upon which *Brooks* went back on the horse, and she and I went home.

Brooks missed his road on his return, but got to the house some time after us; but he did not get the handkerchief, as the soldier would not deliver it, until he saw Mrs. Spooner.

Buchanan and *Brooks* stayed that night in the barn; in the morning went to Mr. Gilbert's tavern and stayed there some time, and on coming out from his house we saw Cummings approaching on one of Mr. Spooner's horses; he told us his was gone to the tavern, and that his mistress desired we should come there, which we did, and had supper; we went to the barn that night, and in the morning she sent us word that her husband was gone abroad into the country to get some oats.

The boy Parker had proposed to *Brooks*, If he would come and meet Mr. Spooner and himself, on their return, the said Parker said he would help to take Mr. Spooner's life. We went over from the barn to the house, and found he was gone, and stayed there all day, and lived on the best the house afforded of meat and drink.

Mr. Spooner came home in the dusk of the evening, so that we had like to have been seen; but we heard him come with the sleigh to the door and Brooks ran into the cellar, and I went and stood on the back stairs, until he went into the sitting-room. We then came out, and went to the barn, there stayed all next day, and at night when Mr. Spooner was in bed, we were sent for to the house and received supper and some liquor to encourage another plan, which Cummings and Parker (who have for this time escaped punishment,) proposed to poor Brooks, which was, they all three to go up stairs, and Brooks to take his life from him; for which he was to receive one thousand dollars, Mr. Spooner's watch, buckles, and as much cloth as would make a suit of clothes; but Brooks's heart failed him; and Mrs. Spooner said she did not think he was so faint hearted.

Had this been done he was to be put into the Well as he was taken out of bed; for she observed it would be thought he had fallen in, while drawing water in the night; next day we had breakfast brought us by Cummings. He informed us there was another plan formed by her, which was as follows. Either Cummings or Parker were to tell Mr. Spooner one of the horses was sick; and as he came to the barn to kill him, and put him amongst the horses' feet, to make people believe when he was found that the horses had killed him.

But Brooks told Parker not to tell him, but to make her believe he would not go over. The boy conducted accordingly. We stayed all that day and night. The next day being Sunday, we stayed there; she came over at night; we told her we should go away the next morning; she desired we would not; but we would not stay. We set out to go to Springfield, as we went through Western on that road, we engaged to work with one Mr. Marks, a smith; I Buchanan worked there two days; but as he had no flies fit for the branch of trade Brooks followed, we proposed to go to Worcester to get home, which was agreed to.

We set off on Wednesday about noon, and in going by Mr. Spooner's we called and told her where we were going; she said she would follow us down the next day as she wanted to see her sister, saying she was glad we had got work so near; and further added, that she had got two notes one of 20 pounds, lawful, and another of 300 dollars, which she would endeavour to get changed, and let me, Buchanan, have one hundred dollars, to purchase any thing I might want.

We stayed in the barn till morning, and then set out for Worcester, and she followed us the same day and called at Mrs. Walker's for us, according to agreement; she came in and stayed some time, and gave me, Buchanan, a note, as much cloth as made a shirt, and 6 or 7 dollars, observing that they came from one M'Donald, an acquaintance of hers; she then went to see her sister, and desired us to stay till she came back, which we did; she returned on Friday morning about 10 o'clock, and stayed till night; she told me, Buchanan, at parting, that she had no more paper money, but what she had given me; but begged I would procure her some poison to give Mr. *Spooner*; I accordingly that day got one drachm of Calonel, and made it into 20 papers. I desired her to give one in the morning, she told me she never gave him any; she went to her sister's late that night and called on us in the morning, about ten o'clock. I went to the door; she would not come in, but desired me to come up to Mr. Nazro's shop, and she would get files for us, as we had not money sufficient to get what we wanted; she asked me, when we would come through

Brookfield. I told her if she would set up, we would call on Monday night at eleven o'clock, she said she would; I parted with her and sent Brooks up to the shop. But as he came in sight he saw her ride from the door, and therefore did not go there; we stayed at Walker's until Sunday afternoon, and then left Worcester, and about 8 o'clock at night got to Mr. Spooner's; we saw Mrs. Stratten at the Well, Buchanan spoke to her, she told me there was company in the house, but she would let Mrs. Spooner know we were there; Mrs. Spooner came out, and told us that one Mr. Ross was in the house, who had a brace of pistols loaded, and that he had promised her he would kill Mr. Spooner as he came home from the tavern, she desired us to come in, which we did, he shewed us a pistol, and said Mr. Spooner should die by that to night. Either Brooks or Buchanan said it would alarm the neighbours.

Brooks said if Ross would help him he would knock him down, accordingly it was agreed on, and there was a look out kept at the sitting room door for his coming, in the mean time there was some supper brought by Mrs. Stratten to us, we had had some flip before, and there was now some rum brought, which we drank, each of us by turns giving a look out. We are certain Mrs. Stratten could not but know what was going forward. That we leave the public to judge of. Mr. Spooner was at length seen coming, and then was the time for the Devil to shew his power over them who had forsaken God.

An account of the murder as if was committed.

William Brooks went out and stood within the small gate leading into the kitchen, and as Mr. Spooner came past him he knocked him down with his hand. He strove to speak when down, Brooks took him by the throat and partly strangled him. Ross and Buchanan came out; Ross took Mr. Spooner's watch out and gave it to Buchanan; Brooks and Ross took him up and put him into the well head first; before they carried him away, I, Buchanan, pulled off his shoes: I was instantly struck with horror of conscience, as well I might; I went into the house and met Mrs. Spooner in the sitting room; she seemed vastly confused: She immediately went up and brought the money which was in a box. She not having the key desired me to break it open which I did; At the same time Brooks and Ross came in: She gave two notes of 400 dollars each to Ross to change and give the money to Brooks: But there was found some paper money, which Brooks received (24• dollars) and the notes were returned. At the same time she gave Ross four notes, each of them ten pounds, to purchase camblet for a riding dress. Ross gave Brooks his waistcoat, breeches and a shirt. She went and brought Ross a waistcoat breeches and shirt of Mr Spooner's when they were shifted she gave me, Buchanan, three eight dollar bills, and asked me when she should see me again, I told her in fourteen days but it pleased God to order it sooner, and in a dreadful situation. Had we all been immediately struck dead after the perpetration of so horrid a murder, and sent to Hell, God would have been justified and we justly condemned.

About 11 o'clock at night, we set off for Worcester. About 4 o'clock in the morning we reached Mrs. Walker's house; Mary Walker and a Negro girl were within; we told them a parcel of lies to excuse our sudden return; in the morning we went to drinking to endeavour to drown the thoughts of the horrid action we had been guilty of;

we stayed there all day with a view to go off at night, but it pleased God to order it otherwise; for Brooks being in liquor, went down to Mr. Brown's tavern; there shewing Mr. Spooner's watch, and the people seeing him have silver Buckles became suspicious of him, and one Ensign Clark going to Mrs. Walker's and seeing what passed there gave information concerning us. The news of the murder had now reached the town, and we were all taken, and brought before the Committee, examined, and committed to gaol.

On the 4th of April last we were brought to trial before the Superior Court, found guilty and received sentence of death.

JAMES BUCHANAN,
EZRA ROSS,
WILLIAM BROOKS his mark

James Buchanan was a Serjeant in the army under Gen. Burgoyne born in Glasgow in Scotland aged 30 years.

William Brooks, a private in said army, born in the parish of Wednesbury in the county of Statford, in England, aged 27.

Ezra Ross a soldier in the continental army, born in Ipswich in the parish of Lyndebrook, New-England, aged 18.