destined after his fateful decision to oppose the rebellion. How different our memory of him might have been had the Revolution not destroyed his political career in midstream.

*California State University*  
*San Diego, California*


The "Oberlin-Wellington Rescue" of 1858-1859 was one of those passionate, portentous events that both reflect and direct the course of history. In August 1858, a slave catcher came to Oberlin, Ohio, in search of runaways. His mere presence in the town alarmed the community, particularly those at Oberlin College who had made the school a center of abolitionist and reform sentiment. The college and the community had long since distinguished itself in the service of the black man — the college and the community’s schools were racially integrated, Oberlin was an important station on the underground railroad, blacks held important local positions, and the people prided themselves on their devotion to the "law of conscience," the "higher law," a law, they said, which invalidated such statutes as the despised Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.

When word spread that a local black man, one John Price, had been lured out of Oberlin, captured as a fugitive slave, and carried off to nearby Wellington to await the train south, the community reacted. A swarm of townspeople, both whites and blacks, along with students and faculty from the college rushed to Wellington, rescued Price, returned him to Oberlin, and helped him escape to Canada. Here was an open, flagrant violation of the law and repudiation of the federal government. Federal marshals moved in immediately, arrested some thirty-seven "rescuers," and began prosecution proceedings against them in Cleveland where the United States district court sat, and where Democrats, vocally unsympathetic towards abolitionists, were in the majority. (The jury was made up exclusively of Democrats, the rescuers charged.) The twenty who eventually stood trial included students, professors, and prominent professional people of Oberlin. One of the indicted was Jacob R. Shipherd, a freshman at Oberlin.
and a nephew of John Jay Shipherd, founder of the college. After the trial, young Jacob hurriedly but carefully assembled the relevant documents from the trial transcript, the newspapers, pamphlets, and sermons and printed them in bookform to tell the world the History of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue. Da Capo Press has now reprinted the original edition exactly as it appeared in 1859.

The volume begins with an Introductory Note by two of the rescuers, Reverend H. E. Peck, professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy at Oberlin, and Ralph Plumb, an attorney who helped engineer the rescue. Their brief note sets the tone for the book: they begin and end with a slashing attack on the Fugitive Slave “ordinance, misnamed law.” The odious law is denounced as a violation of freedom — the black man’s and the white man’s — a violation so great that friends of freedom should feel no compunction about violating it, forcefully if necessary. Peck and Plumb, as do all the other defendants, shifted the burden of the case from their “crime” to the criminality of the law itself and used the courtroom as a forum for eloquent denunciations of the law and for attacks against the “Moloch of Slavery.” One of the most eloquent appeals to conscience was made by Charles Langston, one of the black rescuers. Asked whether he had anything to say for himself before being sentenced, Langston arose and, amidst cheers and applause from Oberlinites, squared off against the hostile judge: “I ask your Honor . . . to place yourself in my situation, and you will say with me, that if your brother, if your friend, if your wife, if your child, had been seized by those who claimed them as fugitives, and the law of the land forbade you to ask any investigation, and precluded the possibility of any legal protection or redress, — then you will say with me, that you would not only demand the protection of the law, but you would call in your neighbor and your friends, you would ask them to say with you, that these your friends could not be taken into slavery.”

Shortly after Langston’s conviction in May 1859, court recessed until July. The prosecution was winning, but losing. Langston was only the second man tried; eighteen remained, and the proceedings had already taken months and cost thousands of dollars. Worse, as the national press looked on, the defendants, refusing to leave jail, turned their incarceration into a showcase for their cause. Friendly jailors allowed one man to operate a press in his cell and publish an issue of a newspaper; Reverend Peck preached from his cell window to a throng of sympathizers outside; brass bands from Oberlin and sur-
rounding towns came and played freedom songs; leading Republicans like Joshua R. Giddings and Governor Salmon P. Chase made political capital out of the trial. Everyone but the judge and jury seemed to stand resolutely behind the rescuers. Then the case came to an abrupt halt. In Oberlin the slave catchers were indicted for kidnapping, and their attorneys worked out a deal with the prosecution in Cleveland to have all charges dropped and all prisoners exchanged. Thus ended, as brass and string bands from Oberlin serenaded the returning heroes, the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue. America was on the verge of armed conflict; John Brown had visited the Western Reserve during the trial and had recruited two Oberlin blacks to accompany him and aid his attack on Harper's Ferry. The Irrepressible Conflict was at hand, and the event at Oberlin and Wellington was part of the prelude.

Allegheny College
Meadville, Pennsylvania

Bruce Clayton

Book Note

Condor Books, 95 Mortimer Street, London, WIN 8 HP, has announced the October reprint publication of Haniel Long's *The Marvelous Adventure of Cabeza de Vaca* and of *Malinche*. Each 75 pp., cloth.

F. C. McL.