

Gilbert Russell Statement, 11-26-11

[26 November 1811]

Governor Lewis left St. Louis late in August, or early in September 1809, intending to go by the route of the Mississippi and the Ocean, to the City of Washington, taking with him all the papers relative to his expedition to the Pacific Ocean, for the purpose of preparing and putting them to the press, and to have some drafts paid which had been drawn by him on the Government and protested. On the morning of the 15th of September, the Boat in which he was a passenger landed him at Fort Pickering in a state of mental derangement, which appeared to have been produced as much by indisposition as other causes. The Subscriber being then the Commanding Officer of the Fort on discovering from the crew that he had made two attempts to Kill himself, in one of which he had nearly succeeded, resolved at once to take possession of him and his papers, and detain them there until he recovered, or some friend might arrive in whose hands he could depart in Safety.

In this condition he continued without any material change for five days, during which time the most proper and efficacious means that could be devised to restore him was administered, and on the sixth or seventh day all symptoms of derangement disappeared and he was completely in his senses and thus continued for ten or twelve days. On the 29th of the same month he left Bluffs, with the Chickasaw agent the interpreter and some of the Chiefs, intending to proceed the usual route thro' the Indian Country, Tennessee and Virginia to his place of destination, with his papers well secured and packed on horses. By much severe depletion during his illness he had been considerably reduced and debilitated, from which he had not entirely recovered when he set off, and the weather in that country being yet excessively hot and the exercise of traveling too severe for him; in three or four days he was again affected with the same mental disease. He had no person with him who could manage or controul him in his propensities and he daily grew worse until he arrived at the house of a Mr. Grinder within the Jurisdiction of Tennessee and only Seventy miles from Nashville, where in the apprehension of being destroyed by enemies which had no existence but in his wild imagination, he destroyed himself, in the most cool desperate and Barbarian-like manner, having been left in the house intirely to himself. The night preceeding this one of his Horses and one of the Chickasaw agents with whom he was traveling Strayed off from the Camp and in the Morning could not be found. The agent with some of the Indians stayed to search for the horses, and Governor Lewis with their two servants and the baggage horses proceeded to Mr. Grinders where he was to halt until the agent got up.

After he arrived there and refreshed himself with a little Meal & drink he went to bed in a cabin by himself and ordered the servants to go to the stables and take care of the Horses, lest they might loose some that night; Some time in the night he got his pistols which he loaded, after every body had retired in a Separate Building and discharged one against his forehead not making much effect—the ball not penetrating the skull but only making a furrow over it. He then discharged the other against his breast where the ball entered and passing downward thro' his body came out low down near his back bone. After some time he got up and went to the house where Mrs. Grinder and her children were lying and asked for water, but her husband being absent and having heard the report of the pistols she was greatly alarmed and made him no answer. He then in returning got his razors from a port folio which happened to contain them and setting up in his bed was found about day light, by one of the Servants, busily engaged in cutting himself from head to foot. He again begged for water, which was given to him and as soon as he drank, he lay down and died with the declaration to the Boy that he had killed himself to deprive his enemies of the pleasure and honour of doing it. His death was greatly lamented. And that a fame so dearly earned as his should be clouded by such an act of desperation was to his friends still greater cause of regret.

(Signed) Gilbert Russell

The above was received by me from Major Gilbert Russell of the [blank] Regiment of Infantry U. S. on Tuesday the 26th of November 1811 at Fredericktown in Maryland.

J. Williams