

they should be served so. I then struck him with a Stick and then he Jump'd up to me with his fist up. I then dropt the Stick and told him if he did not keep back I would shoot him. He kept following of me up and I kept going back with his fist stil up. Then the rest of the Negroes left their work and all of them surrounded me, Gambo with his other hand opened his Breast and said shoot and be Damn'd, I then Shot in my own Defence for fear I should be murdered by them.

A coroner's jury was held later that same day, October 4.

The governor and Council must have deliberated long and hard on Birckhead's petition. In his favor was the fact that a slave was considered a chattel under the laws of the state, the same as a horse or an ox. No one would condemn a man for murdering a bull that went berserk or a horse that could not be broken to the saddle. Although considered chattels, it was nonetheless illegal to murder a slave willfully, and with the British promising freedom for all blacks who deserted to them, slaveowners had to exercise particular caution to ensure that their property did not flee. On the other hand, Birckhead admitted that the whole affair began by his whipping two girls, first Sal and then Tamer, and that the man he murdered had come to their defence. It was only after Birckhead had driven Sal back to the fields and resumed beating Tamar that Gambo and the other slaves encircled him leading to his killing of Gambo. Furthermore, a jury of his peers, after viewing Gambo's body and hearing Birckhead's confession, that had determined he was indeed guilty of willful murder.

Birckhead was ultimately pardoned; even though his heinous act to an extent made a mockery of the words in the Declaration of Independence stating that "all men are created equal." Gambo's murder, tragic in its own right, was especially significant because Birckhead was a birthright Quaker. For Gambo was killed at a time when the Quakers in Maryland were manumitting their slaves in increasing numbers, soon approaching the time when the sect would declare that slaveholding was immoral, ordering that all Friends owning blacks set them free.

The Clifts Monthly Meeting of Friends ordered an investigation into Birckhead's murder of Gambo at its meeting on October 24, even though the confessed murderer was not a practicing Quaker. Francis Birckhead died in poverty leaving