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George and Mary Easton Sibley Papers

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8-1825

## Thomas Mather Journal, 1825-1826

Thomas Mather

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Thomas Mathew

at  
what  
mile

No 2

2

set  
C  
ewhat

Wednesday August 17 - This <sup>miles</sup>  
morning we left our encampment  
on the east Bank of the Little Arkansas  
and after crossing that stream  
(which runs freely over a sandy  
bottom & is on the whole a fine  
creek tho' but little timber on its  
banks) proceeded on our course  
towards the main Arkansas - The  
main is low and wet between  
~~stream~~ <sup>(Little Arkansas)</sup> and the sand hills which  
are distant about four miles  
on our route - We entered the

64

ly, which are of extremely  
regular appearance - The  
ground in many places is drifted  
to a considerable height, and  
in many places are large ponds  
of water standing on the sand -  
There is no vegetation except an  
occasional spot of plumb bushes  
These afford a Red Plum of fine  
flavour - The hills were two or three  
miles in width when we crossed them  
on leaving them we struck another  
low, wet prairie & came in sight  
of the main Arkansas - In a few miles  
we came to a creek in the prairie  
called <sup>9 and 19th</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>camp</sup> ~~of~~ encamped - It

rained violently during that  
night & although protected  
by our marquee we were somewhat  
uncomfortable - distance 97 1/2 miles

Thursday 18 We started early  
this morning and soon reached  
the main Arkansas - The scene  
here presented was entirely novel -  
a large river of four hundred  
yards in width running through  
an immense prairie, without even  
a solitary tree upon its banks  
so far as the eye could reach -

The river appeared somewhat swollen  
~~and~~ the current was rapid and  
the water muddy, resembling  
the Missouri - There are innumerable

and bars in every direction & the  
from the general appearance it  
may be forded at its present stage  
almost any when - some of our hunters  
who were in advance of us had crossed  
and were pursuing Buffalo on the  
opposite bank - we were compelled  
to proceed a mile or two up the river  
to find sufficient drift wood to cook  
our breakfast - this being done we  
proceeded on our course near the  
bank of the river some distance & en-  
camped - Rattle snakes are very  
abundant - The banks of the river  
are almost a perfect plain on this  
side & not more than four feet high  
- on the opposite side the sand

hills make in to the brink of  
the river - distance to day  
10 miles genl. course

Friday 19 After breakfast we  
set out, pursuing our course up the  
river - with several others I went  
in advance of the waggons - I saw  
several large white wolves - also a Hawk  
- in a few miles we came up with  
several herds of Buffalo - Col R. Noyes,  
MWB game keeper & killed one - After  
waiting some time for the waggons to come  
up, we returned three or four miles  
& found the main party had  
encamped - one of the mules having  
been badly bit by a Rattle-snake

- several of the men had gone  
in pursuit of a drove of Buffalo  
cows & calves (the first we had fallen in  
with) that had crossed from the  
opposite side of <sup>the</sup> river, in <sup>view</sup> ~~sight~~ of  
the party - They soon returned with  
a large quantity of meat & much  
gratified with their chase - distance  
to day 7 1/2 miles, gent course.

Saturday 20 - Remained in camp  
for the purpose of drying our meat -  
our horses also require rest

Mr Brown ascertained the Latitude of this  
place to be  $38. 11 \frac{1}{2} . 00$  Longitude  $98. 00. 00$

Sunday 21 This morning is cool  
the night has been more  
like New Spain any - we

struck our tents after breakfast  
and took a course up the  
river in the direction of a  
small grove of timber - The  
high weeds in the bottom prairie  
continue troublesome, but there  
are some indications that we  
have nearly passed them - The  
soil over which we now pass is  
rich, of the first rate quality -

On our right & about a mile from  
the river the prairie is considerably  
rolling - Its appearance justifies  
the conclusion that the country  
to the north is more favorable  
for a permanent route - from the  
high ground, skirts of timber

in that direction appears  
and the trace which we  
left the other day from  
its general course would  
have led us two or three miles  
north, & through a handsome  
country. The grove we discovered  
at starting this morning turns out  
to be an island in the river and  
which is a few bottom woodens. We  
have travelled  $6\frac{1}{2}$  miles & encamped  
on the bank of the river, where lately there  
has been a large encampment of  
Indians. General course

Monday 22 The grass at this place  
being good we went today for the  
first of our horses.

Tuesday 23. The waggon being started  
we <sup>myself & myself</sup> rode to the N & over the high ground  
& found in about a mile from the  
river an extensive and beautiful plain.  
Upon entering it, a creek appears  
skirted with timber to the N East  
and apparently running parallel  
with the main river for a considerable  
distance & probably 8 or 10 miles  
from it. This is doubtless the  
creek upon which we encamped  
on the 17th. The ~~country~~ short  
Buffalo grass now prevails  
generally & large herds are  
grazing in various directions.  
Several ran past us - my horse

was much alarmed - he is no  
hunter - traps a village  
of Prairie dogs - they resemble  
puppies of two or three weeks old - their  
houses are under ground, and the ar-  
rangement of them & of their villages  
is curious, the latter are some times three  
or four miles square - their houses  
within eight or ten feet of each  
other - the high grass, weeds & other  
vegetables seem to be entirely re-  
moved & regularity & neatness prevail  
- passing through their town many of  
them are seen sitting on the little em-  
inence of sand which surrounds their  
houses; on the approach of any one, or

of apparent danger they commence  
yelping & barking, and immediately  
retreat into their houses - There  
is a singular union existing between  
these dogs, cattle snakes, screech owls  
& night hawks - all of which live  
together in the same house with  
apparent concord - It is said  
that upon any appearance of indica-  
tion of a storm or rain, they com-  
mence repairing their houses by  
building up the embankment about  
the door or mouth - This is considered  
a sure omen of the approach of a storm  
- found occasionally as we passed  
over the plains of short grass, small  
ponds of water - The best ground



Bluff north of us is doubtless the  
dividing ridge between the Arkansas  
& Kansas - a few miles ahead it  
approaches very near the former &  
is doubtless the most northern bend  
of that river - saw some indications  
of timber at a distance, supposed  
to be the waters of the Kansas -  
The distance between the two rivers  
cannot be great - after travelling  
12 or 15 miles we bore away for the  
river & found that the waggon  
road halts just below a large  
grove, called the pit grove having  
made nine miles - got down

Wednesday 24 - There was a sudden  
rise in the river last night & no dew  
- the mosquitoes were troublesome - we  
stuck tent after breakfast and passed  
the large grove of cotton woods  
which is on the opposite side of  
the river - The bluff continues about three  
miles from the river - We now are passing  
the ~~south~~ northernmost bend of the Arkansas -  
Large herds of Buffalo are grazing on the  
side of the ridge on our right - after  
travelling 8 or 9 miles through a rich bottom  
we came to a large creek called Walnut  
Creek, which comes in between the bluff  
& river from the northwest - We crossed

and encamped on the peninsula between  
the creek river & on the bank of the  
former. The water is much better than  
the river, being clear <sup>with good bottom,</sup> the river is exceeding-  
ly muddy and does not settle like  
that of the Missouri. There is a fine  
grove of Walnut & Blue ash on the  
banks of this creek, which are high  
& clear of wads, bushes &c we have  
not found better camping ground on  
our route. Our hunters have  
come in with a supply of meat  
and report that the Kansas river  
cannot be more than 10 miles  
from us. This being a point  
strongly marked, we shall wait

for Mr Brown to take such observations  
as may be thought necessary.

Thursday 25 Should the government  
determine to establish a military  
post with reference to the protection  
of the trade to New Mexico, this  
point must doubtless be selected  
- It is the only place where timber  
can be procured, & even here it is  
by no means abundant. In other  
respects it may be considered more  
eligible than any point we have  
passed. The water of the creek is in  
quality pure - in quantity abundant  
and the surrounding country high  
with every indication of sublimity.

As far as local causes are concerned  
The expense of subsisting a garrison  
here would be great - Supplies would  
mainly have to be transported by  
land from Fort Osage to the settlements  
on the Big Little bluffs - From the  
best estimate I am able to make the  
expense of transportation would  
be from  $\$4$  to  $\$2$  per foot - There  
is a prospect of rain & we have  
determined to make no excursions  
from Camp to day - Some of the  
men have found large quantities of  
shells of some flowers on the  
small sand hills a mile or two  
to the west of us -

Friday 26 - remained at our encamp-  
ment - shortly after our arrival at  
this place one of the young men  
who went in chase of some Buffalo  
that we started from this evening  
lost his horse - He got down  
for the purpose of shooting at  
the B & the animal took flight  
and joined a large drove of  
the Buffalo & was seen no  
more - To day our hunters have  
brought in some very fine meat  
Mr Brown found the latitude  
to be at this place from an ob-  
servation taken this night 38. 21. 60

Saturday 27 This morning W  
Sibley, W Gamble & W Brown with  
two or three men set out for the  
Arkansas River immediately opposite  
this place - Col Reeves with some  
of the men have gone to explore the  
course of this creek - I remain with  
the rest of the men in camp & am reading  
Compan poems - Two young <sup>men</sup> came  
to the camp who are of a party going  
to Santa Fe - Their number is four  
& are direct from Cantonment  
Gibson, which place they think  
is three hundred & fifty miles below  
this - The mouth of the Little Arkansas  
we suppose is 100 miles

One the young men (W Poyer) has  
been at Santa Fe - was of W Glenn  
party - he thinks the route we are  
pursuing, much the most eligible  
The little party passed us last night  
& encamped two or three miles above  
us - Hearing on evening gun disch-  
arged when within a short distance  
of us, they supposed it from an  
Indian encampment, & deemed it  
advisable to pass under cover of the  
night - as they passed, they saw Brown  
fires that they were mistaken - and  
not wishing to produce a needless  
alarm by calling in the night

passed on with the intention of visit-  
ing us to day - Col Revere & his  
party returned after travelling several  
miles & find that the creek is  
much longer than was supposed  
& its course appears nearly parallel  
with the river for a considerable  
distance - Mr Sibly & his party re-  
turned just at sundown after travelling  
in the course of the day about 25  
miles - They found the distance  
from this place to the southern-  
most bend of the smoky fork of  
the Kansas 10 1/2 miles & from  
an observation of the sun the  
latitude at that point 38.30.29

The Kansas at this point is a  
very inconsiderable stream &  
wastes itself in a marsh a  
short distance below - At  
the lower end of this marsh there  
is a large lake from which  
the river is again formed -  
Iron ore in quantities are here  
found -

Tuesday 28 The sun shines  
pleasantly & the breeze is refresh-  
ing this morning, after the  
most violent storm I remember  
to have witnessed, which I com-  
menced at gochok last night

and continued till morning  
- The thunder rumbled & the  
lightning flashed incessantly  
for several hours there seemed  
one continued blaze - It was  
invincible in a high degree - The  
rain beat through our marquee  
and our blankets were not all  
together sufficient to protect  
us from the wet - The night  
was passed most uncomfortably  
- After drying our blankets, Bear  
Tents &c we struck our tents and proceed  
ed on our course - In about 4 miles  
we passed the four young men spoken  
of yesterday -

We encamped on the bank of the river  
which was much swollen & presented  
in the evening a beautiful appear-  
ance - we sat for some time admiring  
the scene presented by the bright rays  
of the moon reflected in the water  
Perhaps

distance to day 7 miles Genl come  
Monday 29 I left the waggons just as  
they were getting out this morning, and  
bearing out from the river for a mile or  
two came to short grass - the general

appearance of the country does not change. on the west bank of the river the sand hills continue & high ground on this side is from two to three miles. I spied two large villages of prairie dogs - saw two white & one gray wolf, & great numbers of Buffalo - fell in company with the four adventures to Hawk Eye and travelled with them several miles till we came to a creek of considerable size running through the prairie, which was so much swollen as to render it impassable except with rafts - the young men encamped & I stopped for some time - our company not

coming up I returned two or three miles & found them encamped on the same bank near its junction with the river they having travelled ten miles - opposite our encampment on the edge of the bluff is a ledge of rocks & presents the appearance of a large mound. This is the first of the kind I have noticed in this range of high land.

Tuesday 30 Got out after an early breakfast - rode to the eminence opposite last night's camp - the prospect from the top of the rock is very extensive and romantic. The country on every

side presents the appearance of  
an inclined plain, and the  
stems of timber or walnut  
creek to the north and of

creek & river to the south  
beautiful & enriches the scene

— We camped at the creek on  
which we lay last night, &  
on 4 miles distance, on a  
delightful plain of short grass.

Buffals are becoming much  
more numerous & our hunters  
have been very successful to day.

— Mr. S. & Mr. G. have been to the  
creek about 7 or 8 miles north  
of us, it is walnut creek &

from the face of the country  
& the course of the creek, which  
affords much better water than  
the river, it is highly probable  
a better route for the road  
may be found in that di-  
rection.

Wednesday 31 We crossed the creek  
this morning without difficulty and  
bore in a direction to strike the  
river at the mouth of the pass  
fork, leaving the high ground to  
left — at this place the bluff is  
hard & rocky & near the river —  
found this fork too high to cross



at this place - proceeded up two  
or three miles & encamped on  
the bank of the creek - distance  
about eight miles - The prospect  
from the bluff at this place  
is fine - Several names carved on  
the rocks, which are almost all  
sandstone - This creek is generally  
land bottom, tho' the banks are  
very high & muddy - it has been  
much swollen by the late rain & no  
doubt from the appearance of the  
shores is subject to great swells,  
they seem not unfrequently to  
be inundated -

Thursday September 1. After digging  
the banks of the creek a short  
distance above our encampment  
& immediately opposite the point of  
the bluff, we crossed with our waggon  
& pursuing a direction South  
I was - we again intersected  
the river near the mouth of a  
small clear creek, with gravel  
bottom - following the bank  
of the creek some distance we  
encamped having travelled 10<sup>1/2</sup>  
miles - so far the distance from  
this creek to the river in our  
place exceeds 20 rods - The  
river bottom is higher than

evil of better quality than  
Litcher's -

Friday 2 A stormy day - we  
remain at our encampment -

Saturday 3 Last night we  
were roused from our slumbers  
about 10 o'clock by the rumbling of  
our horses past the encampment  
Expecting that a party of Indians  
were advancing towards us immediate  
preparations were made for defence -  
none however made their appearance  
and it was concluded that the

fright of the horses was occasioned  
by the near approach of Buffalo  
or wild horses - At 9 o'clock we  
set out again - the waggon proceeded up  
the river which at this bend is nearly  
a south course - I rode over the ridge  
several miles & find that the prairie  
fork heads near the main river &  
is not distant from it more than 8  
or ten miles in any place, judging from  
the timber which I saw on that creek  
which appears quite abundant - Upon  
turning towards the river I found that  
the waggon was directly opposite mine &  
about to encamp - The bottom here

is considerably wider than below  
at this place is between two or  
three miles in width - crossed a creek  
which meanders through the  
bottom, which must be the  
same upon which we encamped  
last night - saw five wild horses -  
during my ride - I had met Peeps  
S. before this - we got down & the  
horses came within 150 yards of  
us - they were animals of good appearance  
with fine long flowing tails - they  
fired at one of them for the purpose  
of crossing him - they started off at the  
report of the gun & snuffed the breeze in  
opposite direction of any effort of ours to

take them - upon joining the  
wagons found they had travelled  
about 12 miles & encamped on the  
bank of Arkansas - The general  
appearance, soil &c of the country  
passed to day is the same as for the  
last three or four days - On the  
opposite side of the river at this place  
the sand hills are nearly covered with  
verdure - there is a large grove of timber  
also & apparently timber is scattering for  
a considerable distance up the river on  
that side - Williams who crossed the river  
& shot an Elk & came to camp just  
as we stopped reports that there is  
an abundance of squirrels on that

side - as we have not found any for  
some days past, several of the young  
men are wading the river, to ascertain  
are they to procure some - The weather  
as yet does not appear settled - The day has  
been pleasant but there is every indi-  
- cation of a storm to night - & like the  
previous days are preparing our horses  
for it -

Sunday 4 The wind blows fresh  
from the South West & is quite  
cool - have had no rain as was  
expected last night - Started at  
Nine o'clk & pursued a course  
about South 30 W, up the river -

the bottom continues high & dry  
and its width increases - for some  
distance to day the bluff entirely  
disappeared, so gentle was the rise  
from the river - We traveled 12  
miles & encamped on the bank  
of the river - here the bluff can  
scarcely be discerned - There are  
several islands in the river  
in sight covered with grass  
The sand hills continue  
covered with grass & considerable  
timber -

Monday 5<sup>th</sup> Let out at 9 o'clock  
thunder warm - proceeded up the  
river about 10 miles - The country  
from the river rises gradually, the  
bluff almost entirely disappearing -  
The soil is sandy & has been for  
a day or two past - At this place  
there is a single cotton wood tree  
& just above us are several - the  
first timber I have noticed for  
some time, on this bank of the Arkansas,  
- a strong indication of a storm  
to night - the distant thunder & lightning  
& roaring of the winds is tremendous, such  
as at its distance it is probable it will

have spent its force before it  
reaches here -

Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> The storm was violent  
last night - the wind was strong and  
it was near blowing our tent away -  
the rain has ceased & the wind  
continues & we are preparing to travel  
a few miles to day - After leaving  
our encampment in about 2 1/2 miles  
the bluff again appears & appears  
near the river it is bold & rocky - paper  
a large spring flowing out of it -  
in the river is quite a cluster of  
islands, near the head of which the  
bluff rises makes entirely to the  
bluff which is a perpendicular

cliff of rocks about 20 feet high - under this a warm spring issues - we encamped about half a mile above this point & in the most southerly bend of the river -

The sand hills for the first time since we struck the Arkansas now entirely disappear & the face of the country on the opposite side is much like the upland on this

W. M. M. own finds from a satisfactory observation that the latitude of this place is 37.38.00

Wednesday 7 Lay by today in order to give W. M. B. an opportunity to make preparations for observations

as to the longitude - The hunters crossed the river & report that they find a creek of some magnitude 10 or 15 miles from the river & running S. E.

Thursday 8 Remains in camp

Friday 9. At 1/2 past 9 this morning we struck our tents and again proceeded, - our route continuing up the river & bearing N. W. The bluff is from 1/2 to 2 miles from the river & in some places bold & rocky - passed a stream of about 12 feet in width running with some force near the river & presented

with it - found it to be a  
part of the main river which  
had washed its way out and  
resembled a mill race - rested  
for an hour at a lonely cotton  
wood tree a short distance above  
the head of the race - there are a large  
number of islands in the river in  
this part of it - The country on the  
opposite side does not now differ  
materially from this side except  
that it rises gradually from  
the river & there are a few trees along  
the river in places - After travelling  
12 1/2 miles we encamped - at this place the  
the river washes the bluff, which is

more of a gentle slope from the  
river than otherwise - far no  
Buffalo to day

Saturday 10 - Our route to day is  
nearly West - The Islands continue nu-  
merous in the river - some of them covered  
with timber - we have travelled upward  
of 13 miles ~~to~~ day - encamped on the  
bank of the river - about three miles  
from this we crossed a deep ravine which  
makes in from the high ground to  
the river. So Walker pointed out  
two Caches where a party of  
traders, in whose company he  
was, deposited their merchandise.

in the winter of - Near  
this is a curious formation  
in the shape of a rock, composed  
of river sand, gravel & limestone.  
It being at least 50 feet above the  
surface of the river, it is a matter  
of speculation, what has caused it  
no material change in the face of  
the country -

Sunday 11 - We had proceeded but a  
short distance this morning before  
we were compelled to ascend the  
hills, as the river & bluff which  
is very broken are so near as to  
obstruct a passage between them.  
The hollows seem to indicate that

the country is entirely of  
stone character - quarries  
what appear to be slacked  
lines the sides of many of them  
- many of the cliffs are covered with  
a white substance, some of which  
much resembles chalk - After passing  
three or four miles on the hills, we  
descended to the bottom at a  
very beautiful little grove of  
Cotton woods, which we passed  
and encamped about a mile  
above - Mr. Brown surveyed on  
to a tree about a mile above  
our encampment, where  
according to computation by  
our survey, the boundary line



crosses the river - - The point  
is about a hundred miles lower  
than as laid down on Robinson's  
map, but it must be incorrect.

Monday 12 Having reached the  
point beyond which our instructions  
do not warrant us in proceeding, we  
are waiting to hear from the gov-  
ernment, - The Sec of War having  
informed us that authority to  
proceed would be forwarded to  
us as soon as arrangements  
with the Mexican government  
to that effect should be entered  
into. The altitude of this place

is 37.48.37 by Mr Brown's ob-  
servation of this day -  
The probability that we will be  
detained some time is so great that  
several hunters were dispatched this  
morning in pursuit of Buffalo, they  
not appearing very plenty at this  
place - the hunters however succeed  
pretty well & have brought in  
a considerable quantity of meat

Tuesday 13 Reading - men engaged  
drying our meat -

Wednesday 14 - Walked up to the  
boundary line with Col Roberts  
the latter marked on a tree

- returned & after dinner a  
board was convened & resolution  
was not to continue the  
surveying & marking of the wood  
without further instructions and  
that we would wait till the  
20<sup>th</sup> Inst, at which time a definite  
decision will be made as to our  
future movements -

Thursday 15 Last night I was  
awakened by some animal as  
I supposed rolling on my blanket  
thinking it might be one of  
our dogs, who sometimes take the  
liberty of coming in to our tent  
I was about to drive him out

when to my astonishment  
found it to be a Grub. I  
immediately retired under my  
blanket & the gentleman soon dis-  
appeared - Willenms killed him this  
morning on the waters edge -  
Several hunters have gone out to  
day, but from appearances from  
the hills, over which I have  
been walking, they must go a  
great distance before they find any  
- during my walk I saw not one

Friday 16 It was late last  
night when the hunters came  
in - They found 7 Buffalo about 15 miles  
distant.

- July 17. The board met to day  
 I hope to return to our own from this  
 in case no instructions  
 arrived in time for us to proceed to  
 the place this gate. Mr. Rice & his  
 party have therefore concluded to proceed  
 in the morning - two of our party were  
 detained. Most have determined to ac-  
 company them -

I had great joy & surprise with the  
 young men when they found they had not  
 any baggage - also they know we  
 were of no importance to the grove about  
 the distance - is in -

Monday 19. Remains at our encampment -  
 the morning calm & winds to day -  
 the night very warm but

B

Contingent Expenses to 20 July -	4396.50
Tray acct. to same day -	2019.00
Paid to Indians	1600.00
	<hr/>
	8009.50
Tray acct. Nov. 20	6640.00
	<hr/>
	14649.50
	100
Per cent	2400



