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Letter from George Sibley to William Clark, February 21, 1811

George Champlin Sibley
Fort Osage

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Fort Osage Feb. 21, 1811.

D^r. Sir,

I have been importuned not a little of late, by the Osages on the Subject of their treatment for the last two or three years from other tribes, particularly the Ioways, Potowatomies & Ottos and altho' I have Repeatedly Referred them to the Agent M^r. Chouteau, and told them (till I am tired that I have no official Right of interference in Such Matters, yet they will continue to furthen me with their complaints and Representations and I am absolutely obliged either to listen or by Refusing, give them great offence- They address themselves to me as an Agent of the U. S. (there being no one else here will will take any part in Indian affairs of any kind; and no one appointed to attend to them here, and it being very inconvenient they Say to wait upon their Agent in St^t. Louis) and in a very Serious and impressive manner have Related their grievances and desired me to Represent them to the Authority most likely to afford Redress; at the Same time expressing their wish that I Should make them known to you, in the hope that altho' your Agency does not extend over them, yet it may not be looked upon as improper to expect your interference in their behalf with those Tribes which the Resident has placed under your Control.- They complain (and I believe justly) that while they have for the last two or three years faithfully observed the counsels they have Received from the U. S. and Strictly Refrained from making war on the Neighboring Tribes; that while they have considered themselves under the Care and Protection of the U. S. and treated our Citizens as brothers; they have Successively and heretofore without Redress been Subjected to the unprovoked attacks of the Ioways, Ottos, Sioux, and Potowatomies, who have Robbed them of their Horses, and murdered their People insulted the benevolent and just policy of the U. S. and have nearly, if not quite compelled them (the Osages) to the last Resort, the Tomahawk and Scalping Knife.- In the Month of Nov^r. 1809 four of their people

were murdered almost within Sight of the Garrison by a party of Sioux and Ioways (as they are well informed) who Surprised them in their hunting Camp- in the following Spring, a number of Horses were Stolen from them, within a few Miles of the Garrison by the Ottos, as they have Reasons to believe.-

In July following, two of their Men were wantonly killed as they were peaceably traveling to their village in this vicinity, as they very much Suspect by the Ottos.- And in December last, five of their People were killed and made prisoners by a War party of the Potowatomies Several other affairs of less consequence have taken place, which tho' too trivial to need a particular detail after the above, are nevertheless Sufficient to alarm their fears.- These unprovoked attacks have very much alarmed this Tribe of Osages, and have tended very much to lessen their confidence in the protection that has been promised them by the U. S. and if not Redressed and prevented from Recurring in future, will compel them to Seek Revenge themselves contrary to the advice and disinterested counsels of the President-"If", Say they, "the U. S. will not Redress our Wrongs, which are So manifest and great, Suffer us at least to Redress them ourselves, and not keep our hands tied (while those of our enemies are left untied) till we are all cut off by piece meal."-

Thus much I have been induced to Say on the Subject, by the earnest desire of the Chief and leading warriors of this people; and let me add, partly from a conviction on my Mind of the propriety and justice of the appeal.- I have neither time nor inclination to enter more minutely into the Subject, or to make any comments on the matters complained of- nor do I Suppose it at all necessary.-

The Chief and leading Men of the Little Osages are very much inclined to encourage the Kansas and Missouri to join them in their Settlement near this place, and I Suspect Some negotiations are going on among them to that effect- The Missouri have sent two Men here to Sound the Osages on the Subject, one of whom has Returned to bring the whole Tribe here

(as I am informed) who are daily expected- There are also Three of the Ottos here on business with the Osages- It is Rumored that the Ottos will also Remove to this Neighborhood, if the Missouris leave them. (You know the Missouris and Ottos live within Sight of each other and are as one Nation in case of war)

That Osages have an influential man at this time among the Kansas, probably his business may be to effect an alliance between the two Tribes It is well understood that about half of the Kansas are Ready now to Remove here.- Altho I do not by any means calculate on all their movements taking place (for I know well enough how little Reliance is to be put in Indian projects which a Storm of snow may defeat or postpone, and a thousand trivial accidents may overturn) yet I could wish to encourage them if it can be done with effect and propriety.- If it were a thing to be desired, I have no doubt but the Big Osages would be glad to Return here, at least Report seems to justify the belief- but I am by no means Solicitous for them to Return, unless indeed they will Reform a little.-

March 5th.- I expected to have Sent this off long ago, but Mr. Audrain waited for the Contractor's Boat, which is expected to day-

Agresably to your Request I have presented the Note you Sent me to Mr. Audrain for payment, and have Rec^d. \$37 on it which I enclose you herein together with the Note, and Refer you for further information Respecting it to young Mr. Audrain who will hand you this, and will call on you when he is Ready to Set out on his Return for Pt. Osage, for any commands you may have for me, which please to put in his care.

Some of the Ottos have been here lately on business with the Osages, they have partially Settled the disputes between the 2 Tribes but have not been able to Remove entirely the Suspicions of the Osages Relative to the murders committed in July last- They promise to Satisfy you on this Subject thro' the medium of Mr. Airde their Trader when he Returns to St. Louis.- I have Reasons to believe that the Osages are preparing to

Set off in a few days to war against the Ioways.

They consulted me (as usual) on this matter but I could only say to them, that if they went to war, I did not believe you would interfere with the Ioways to obtain Redress for the injuries they have done to them (the Osages). Sans Oreille and the Big Soldier appear to be inclined to stop the War, but say it will be very difficult to appease those whose Relatives have been killed and who are numerous and influential.-

I am Sir very Respectfully

Your Mo. Ob^t. Sv^t.

G. C. Sibley.

Gen^l. W^m. Clark

S^t. Louis.

p. Mr. F. Audrain.