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Incomplete Letter from John Sibley to Unknown, November 20, 1808

John Sibley

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John Sibley
Natchitoches
Nov. 20th, 1808

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Sir,

Your letter of the 7th Inst. I duly received. it will give me pleasure to contribute to your Aid in the Work I understand you are engaged in.

In the Year 1805 I was requested by the Executive of the U.S. to take the depositions of Some of the Old Inhabitants of this place relative to the French establishments in this part of Louisiana. I Accordingly took a Number which I Sent to the Secty of War, & kept Copies of them, I herewith enclose you Copies of three of them, which relate particularly to Some of the Points Noted in your letter, a Number of more of Similar Amt might be now added to them If Necessary. The Characters of those deponants whose depositions are enclos'd are so fair that no question can Arise with respect to the Credibility of them, the whol of the Inhabitants of this parish will Certify in their favour. The wife of Antoine leNoir now living at Grand Ecore 4 or 5 Miles above this Town, is a daughter of one of the French Gentleman who made the first Establishment at Bayou Pierre, Madame LeNoir (Commonly Called Liston is now near 70 years of age, was Born & raised at Bayou Pierre, there are Several other decendants of those families now living. It is true that Some of the old Settlers at Bayou Pierre did Receive Rights to their Lands from the Governors of Louisiana residing at New Orleans Anterior to the Cassion of Louisiana to Spain. Some of those Grants I have Seen & Read Myselpe & can by Sending to Bayou Pierre procure either the Originals or Copies of them. It is likewise true that the Settlement of Bayou Pierre was always 'till within less than Thirty Years under the Jurisdiction of the Commandant of Natchitoches. This can be Abundantly proved by the Records of this County in possession of the Parish Judge, and by an hundred depositions of respectable persons now living. It is not true that the Caddos ever Acknowledged the Spaniards as their Father 'till after Louisiana was Ceded to them by France but did Acknowledge the French. There are now living Several Old Caddo Indians who have a distinct Recollection of those times, by whom I have been repeatedly assured of these facts, so did the Yattassees, who now live at Bayou Pierre, the Adaize, The Keychies (formerly Called Nassanetts) the Inies or Nassanies & the Nandacos. This will appear from Speeches of the Chiefs of all those Nations Recorded in my office, Coppies of which May be Seen in the War Office at Washington.-

The old French manuscript in my possession is a Work of Considerable Size written in a Bound folio Volum containing upward of 300 pages it came from the Governors office at St. Antonio by Accident in a Trunk of private papers belonging to a Mr. Menier of this place whose father was governor of the Province of Taches & lived at St. Antonio. this trunk of papers were Sent in here to his Son after the Governors Death.- The Journal is written in a good hand and good Stile, and is entitled "An Historical Journal Concerning the French Establishment of the Colony of Louisiana from the Memoirs of Mons. Iberville & Bianville Royal Governors of the Province, And from the discoveries & Researches of Mons. Bernard de le Harp, Commedant of the Bay of St. Bernard It is Signed, Bernard de la Harp. It Commences by a declaration that all pretentions of Spain to Any part of Sd. Province east of River Grand -- unfounded by any kind of Possession or Occupancy whatever, that neither Ponce de Leon nor Ferdinand de Soto left any Traces of their ever having been in it: but alledges that Mons. du Salle did Take Possession of it in the year 1605 & Planted the Kings Arms at or Near the Mouth of the River Guadeloupe in the Bay of St. Bernard, at which time there were no Spaniards on this Side of River Grand. his Journal Ends with the year 1725 Soon after this manuscript fell into my hands, I informed Mr. Jefferson of it through General Dearborn. The President requested I would have three Copies of it Taken, Send one to Mr. Madison, one to Governor Claiburn, Keep one myselfe & have the Original put in a tight Tin Case & Sent to him by Express. This was all done Accordingly, the receipt of them all were Acknowledged with Thanks & at that time it was thought an important Document.-

From this Journal it appears that in the Year 1714, Govr. Bianville then living at Isle Dauphin Obtained Some information from Mexico that the Spaniards contemplated Making an establishment at or Near Natchitoches on Red River. On the 23d of Augt. the Same year 1714 dispatched Monsr. St. Dennie with Thirty Men with orders to Ascend Red River as far as Natchitoches and ascertain if there were Any Spaniards in that quarter. They arrive at Natchitoches found no Spaniards Nor Could hear of Any. Most of the party return to Isle Dauphin & report; but St. Dennie himselfe proceded on to the Westward & found no Spaniards 'till he Arrived at River Grand where he Found the Mission of St. Francis. he there found a Captain Raymond Commanding the Procedeo or Out Post, he Engaged to Marry the Captains Neice, who it appears was Sister to the wife of the Vice King of Mexico, he goes on to Mexico & was Married, & well Received, & Returned Again to Isle Dauphin- In the Month of January 1717 Sergeant Blondel was Sent from Orleans by the Governor with Six Soldiers with Orders to take possession of the Isle of Natchitoches in Red River, this Order was executed. (This Island is about 12 Miles long & from 5 in Breadth the upper end of it is about half a Mile below the Church at Natchitoches.) In November 1717 Mr. St. Dennie with a Number of Other persons Arrived Natchitoches

from Orleans with a Large quantity of Merchandise, he proceeds Nine Leagues to the West to the Village of the Adaize Indians, there were no Spaniards there at that time, he proceeded On to the River Adaize 10 Leagues farther (Now Called the Sabine) which River he forded, from thence to the Village of the Aiches Nation of Indians who lived where they now do on the Aiche Bayou About 50 Miles to the West of Sabine, or the River Adaize, where he found two Recollets; (friars of the Order of St. Francis) three Soldiers & one Spanish Woman, from thence Mr. St. Dennie proceeded to the Nacozdoches Village, Near where the post of Nacozdoches is now Situate, there he found 4 Ecclesiastics 2 Soldiers & one Woman, from thence he proceeded to the Assinaies Nine Leagues farther. (Now Called Inies who live where they then did On the Angelina River), there he found 2 Priests one Soldier & one Woman, at Trinity he found a Strong Mission, a Captain, an Ensign & 30 Soldiers.- On the 20th of Jany. 1720 Mr. de la Harp Arrived at Natchitoches with a detachment of French Soldiers with orders from the French Govt. to Ascend Red River as far as where the Caddos then lived & there make an establishment, he did so, & found the place No. Lat. 33.55: he Purchased Land of the Chief of the Nassinetts (Keychies) whose Antient Village was near the Sabine (or Adaize River) about 50 Leagues No. Wt. from Natchitoches. The Nearest Spanish Mission to the Caddos at that time was at the Nassinaies on the Angilina River West of Nacozdoches. while Mr De La Harp was at the Nassinetts and Caddos he Received a letter from a Priest at the Trinity River complaining that Monsr. Blondel Commandant of Natchitoches had Chased him Out of the Adaize Village, he Likewise Received a letter from the Captain who commanded at the Trinity River while he was at the Nassinetts expressing his Astonishment to learn that he had Taken possession of a part of Country belonging to his Most Catholique Majesty, his Master, & hopes he will have the prudence to withdraw before he is drove off. To this de La Harp replies that the whol of what the Spaniards

(Incomplete)