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Letter from George Sibley to William Clark, February 3, 1819

George Champlin Sibley
Fort Osage

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George C. Sibley to Governor Clark

Fort Osage 3rd February 1819

Dear Sir, After I had closed and sealed my letter to you of this morning; I have had the principal chiefs of the loways with me, The Hard Heart and the Crane.-They tell me they have just and good claim to the Lands North East of the Missouri, which have been ceded by the Osages to the United States, and they have begged of me to lay their claim before the Government, to request an impartial investigation of it, and to ask for a just and reasonable compensation for the lands in question. An annuity of about 500 dollars would satisfy them I believe –

I have desired of them to refrain from interfering with the surveyors now at work in the country they claim, and to deliver up all the horses and other property among them, belonging to white people, as necessary on their part, to obtain the favor they ask.

Hard Heart says he can only promise to use his utmost exertions to do what I desire. His people are so foolish and so ignorant & so poor that 'tis impossible to make them act as they ought- they are surrounded he says on every side by enemies, who are continually making war upon them; which compels them to be always on watch , sleeping with one eye open, and one hand upon their guns; so that they have but little time to hunt for the subsistence of their families- He says that his people are truly objects of compassion; and most feelingly and urgently begs that the government will allow them an Annual Stipend, either as an act of justice for their Lands, or as an act of charity.

I confess myself an advocate for the loways in this matter. – In every respect, I think it would be sound policy, to say nothing of the probable justice of the measure, for the U States to allow these People an Annuity of about 500 Dollars- The Claims of our Indian Tribes to lands are so extremely vague and undefined, so conflicting and intermixed; that I cannot conceive a much more difficult task, than to assign to each Tribe its proper limits- Therefore I think it would be much better comport with the liberal views and benevolent policy of our Government towards those poor creatures, to satisfy them all by annuities, in proportion to their numbers, for such lands as we desire to add to our domain, used as the hunting grounds of any Tribe or Tribes- The Osages tell me that they claim no lands on the North East side of the Missouri; nor did they sell any to the U.S. The Missouri's once claimed there, but they long since abandoned the Country, and left the loways in possession of it- and it is well known that the loways and Missouri's, once belonged to the same nation, and are with the Ottos , from the same stock with the Osages.-

Perhaps it would be just to say, that the forests and wilds of the Missouri belong in common to those Nations of Indians who live contiguous to them, and hunt thro' them. And that when our People, remuneration ought to be made in common to those Tribes whose Natural pursuits are thus interfered with- Thus we should do justice to all, and satisfy all; which you know is the precise object of the Government; and which I am very certain can never be attained in any other manner.-

The Kansas will be here in the Spring (May) and will be wanting to know of me what the Government has decided on relative to the purchase of their lands.

Very respectfully Sir Your Most Obedient Servant

Signed, G.C. Sibley

His Exc'y Governor Clark.

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