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Letter from George Sibley to Josiah Johnston, January 4, 1825

George Champlin Sibley
St. Louis

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St. Louis January 4th. 1825.

Dear Sir,

It happens to be my misfortune to have fallen deeply in debt to the U: States, and what is still worse, to be unable just now to pay- The case is this- In 1822 I was induced to purchase on credit the Stock of Indian Goods then on hand at the U. S. Indian Factory at Ft. Osage; or rather to become responsible to the Govt. for two other persons who made that purchase conjointly with myself, and who were to have the disposal of the Goods, make the payments, + share with me the profit – owing to a variety of untoward circumstances, and some bad management on the part of my partners, we have failed to meet our engagement, with the Govt: , and the Agent, Mr. Graham, in the discharge of his duty has sent the Paper here to The District Atty to be put in suit. The Amt: due is $\$12,176\frac{70}{100}$ - I have this day agreed with Mr. Bates, the Dist. Atty, to give him power to enter Ind. Agt. ___ (for the above Acct., if Mr. Graham shall on further consideration of the matter so direct him; + Mr. Bates agrees to suspend the matter 'till further instructed. – I am anxious to effect some arrangement by which the Govt. may be secured from any loss and I + my family from ruin, and this I am very sure might be done without difficulty if Mr: Graham can allow me time to make payment by installments out of the avails of my Indian Trade – I am willing to pledge all the property I have to secure the ultimate payment of the debt; either by giving Mortgages on it, or by deeds of Trust or in any other way that may be Required. but I do not wish to have debt entered agt. me if I can help it; because I believe that such a course will seriously injure my Trade operation, + tend so far to paralise them, as to prevent my making payment at all from that source, and then compel me to Sacrifice all my Property and perhaps after all not pay half the debt - A Judgment can only bind my real Property at any Rate; and all I have of that kind would not probably sell for $\$5,000$ if forced off. I am sure it would not; tho' it is in fact worth more than double that Sum. By adding however my personal property, I believe the Security will be ample for the whole debt, the more especially as the debt will be annually reduced as much as possible – If it can be effected. I Sh. be glad to have four years allowed to pay off this debt. very possibly I can pay it sooner, which I will doubtedly do, if I can. I Shall at any rate pay Interest at 6___, and if the debt is well secured as I propose, I cannot see why I might not be allowed even two years, seeing that the Govt. can purchase the use of Money at 4½ ___ half - One thing is absolutely certain, that the immediate pressure of this debt, will completely prostrate me. take from me all my resources, and cause the loss of perhaps half the debt-.

I am ready to pledge all that I can plede to secure the Ultimate Payment of the debt, all that would be liable even under _____. and this is all that can be had out of me at any rate - But I do most anxiously hope that my hands may not be tied, and unnecessary Severity used towards me. but that I may be left free, after yielding up on pledge all my property, to extricate myself from this unfortunate debt, without embarrassing my commercial business more than is absolutely necessary. –

The Net Trade Stock of Paul Baillio ___ may be set down at not less than $\$8,000$ cost (?) – I am possessed of 800 ___ of Land in Jefferson County abt. 30 miles from St. Louis + 5 from Herculareus (?) – 640 Acres in this county 30 miles from St. Louis – 3 lots in St. Louis – 960 Acres in Lillard (?) County on which are some considerable improvements – 5 slaves - abt. 80 head of Meat Cattle 12 Horses + Asses - Besides an unconfirmed claim to 640 Acres of Land where I live, on which, I have expended 3000 dollars in Houses + improvements.

Now Sir, the favour I have to ask of you is, to take the above facts into consideration; and if you shall therefore come to the conclusion that I ought to be allowed the indulgences I ask, to say what you may deem right + proper to Mr. Graham, to effect that object. I have written Mr. G. on the subject and this I do not doubt his readiness to do whatever he may deem right to favour me in this matter, yet I have thought it not amiss to request a good word from you –

What makes me still more desirous to effect this arrangement is, that I have encouraged my Brother's family to come to me, and have held out to them the expectation that I will provide for them as my own-. I am Still anxious to realize to them as far as possible this expectation - But if this storm cannot be averted, I must give up this long cherished project, and forego for a time at least, the happiness that I promised myself from the adoption of my dear Brother's children as my own, and my ability to advocate and provide for them properly. –

It may perhaps be well enough to Say, + you may mention it if you think it proper to Mr. Graham, that in no event that can possibly happen, will I ever offer any other Surety for this or any other debt than myself and Property. I have no doubt but I have friends who would Risk Something to Serve me. But it is what I never will ask or permit. –

I will also just say, that as regards this debt, I can charge myself with no fault, except that of making myself responsible for it. I have never derived the least benefit yet from the Purchase, nor do I ever affect to - Mr. Baillio + Mr. Boggs were both attached to my Agency when it was abolished; they were both poor + about to be turned adrift upon the world, and it was chiefly to benefit them that I entered into the Trade with them as a kind of _____ Responsible Partner. not feeling one doubt of their being able to make all the payments in good time – Their failure is attributable partly to unavoidable accidents, partly to imprudent movements, and partly to Sheer mismanagement.

Of their integrity I have no doubt; and I am sure that experience has taught them prudence + the necessity of exertion – I Shall Remain no longer dormant, but assume (?) the active management of the trade + join my own efforts to their to pay off this debt as fast as possible.

I have Submitted myself and all I have + can control, to secure this debt to the Govt: ; I can do no more, nor could I properly have done less – It remains now for the Gov. to say, whether they will Sacrifice all my means, and only get half the debt; or allow me time to pay it all off with Interest + retain my property, or at least enough of it for the support of my family. –

I have also to beg of you to examine Some affairs of mine in the Govt. Land office, in relation to a claim I have to a tract of 640 Acres of Land under a New Madrid Location.

I cannot persuade myself that Mr. Crawford has acted understandingly, upon my application. Where I have never yet read any direct answer from the Dept. – Perhaps when you have examined the subject you may think my Claim ought to be allowed, and find means to procure from the proper authority what I ask. –

It is expected that Congress will authorise the purchase of the Indian Title to Lands within this State, and direct the Appt. of Commissions to negotiate with the Indians, claiming those Lands for a transfer – I would be glad to be named one of the Commd. and request you to mention me to the President, when their Appt. is authorized – And if, as I learn is very likely to happen, the Osage Agency sh. Become vacant; I hope you will mention me to the President for that Service also – Nothing could suit my situation + circumstances so well, as the Osage Agency; and I am free to say that the Govt. could

not employ any one, who would be more devoted to the service, or who could bring half as much experience into the office as myself – I expected this Appt. each year, but was run foul of by another Governor + lost it. –

And I have one other fav. to ask of you, which is to pay Mr. Niles \$10 for me – You owe me \$10. that I lent you. I owe Niles that sum for a ticket in his Lottery + being unable to get a Bill to send him, am put to the shift to ask you to pay it; and it was by mere accident I happened to remember that you still owed \$10 – You may probably have forgotten it entirely – but I assure you tis true – . – .

I hear but seldom from Ann E. + you, + that indirectly by the way of Natchitoches; I hope you both enjoy good health, and all other blessings. I Presume you keep William at School + as you can chuse (?) the best teachers, I have no doubt about his progress –

Give my love to A.E. when you write me, please to remember that I Shall be much gratified with a line or two as to your + her welfare+ happiness + such matters. from the tenor of this Lt. you may gather mine, my health is good.

Yrs. r. G. c. Sibley

Hon. J.s. Johnston