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Letter from George Sibley to Mary Sibley and Josiah Johnston, January 23, 1827

George Champlin Sibley
St. Louis

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St. Louis January 23d. 1827

My Wife,

If I were to offer a thousand apologies for not writing you more frequently than I do; it would be, I am sure to very little purpose- It would be only a confession in detail of what is sufficiently evident of itself that I am at the _____, a worthless correspondent- So to cut the matter short, you may then set me down if you choose- But, I choose to apart this, & will stand by it. Most however long and neglectful I may have shown myself in Respect of my duty as a correspondent; I am very _____ that I am quite unaltered, and unalterable in my affectionate Regard, and very high Respect for you-

Since my Return from my long, & very unpleasant journey to New Mexico, I have been very much engaged with my affairs at home (which have _____, not a little by my absence) and some business have connected with our new Proud _____ - I am just now on the eve of returning home to my cottage up the Missouri, where I propose to _____ the Remainder of the Winter, and 'till about the 1st. of April when I Shall probably Set out on another journey Westward of about 200 miles, fro the purpose of completing the " Marking out" of the Road to N: Mexo. an Surveyed and located last year-this "finishing stroke" as I hope it will prove, will probably take up about two months; and then there will be ample time for the commissioner to make up & forward their full Report before the meeting of the _____ Congress- I was very desirous that there should have been a Report under last fall after my Return, and made an effort (even before I go home) fro that purpose- But a variety of circumstances not for me to foresee a control prevented it- and on the work was not in fact yet completed, I Readily acquiesced in the proposition to postpone the Report altogether this _____, Seeing that if under at all, it could not Reach the Seat of Gov. before the Rise of congress- I have not the least doubt but that the Report whom this matter will be Satisfactory but interesting to the Gov and the Public.

I was not _____ find very much in favour of the Projects of this Road. in truth I viewed it Rather as a _____ an useless thing calculated (if not designed) more to create an expenditure of Money, then to effect any useful object.

Nothing but the authority given to purchase the Right of way from the Indian Tribes, Reconciled me to it at all; & that above induced me after much hesitation, to have any thing to do with it in any way- I am now perfectly Satisfied that I was in an error- The Survey & Road has cost the Govt. about \$30,000 and is Surly well worth a Hundred thousand- Some valuable & interesting facts have been ascertained, which will doubtless lead to the development of very many more: interesting not only to Missouri & her commerce; but to the confederation & her political views.-The distance from this City to the upper Settlements of New Mexico is Somewhere about a Thousand Miles from thence to the city of Mexico is probably about Fifteen or Sixteen hundred Miles further- Now it is well ascertained that landed carriages of any and every description may be Run with ease and Safety (So far as Relate to mere Road) the whole of this distance: of which about eight Hundred miles is a Wilderness; but this may be passed without any danger or difficulty; if proper precautions are used, and Suitable provision made for the journey.

The Road as it has been located by The _____, is Remarkably straight, its general bearing from F. Osage to _____, being _____ upon the direct line between those two points- Water, fuel, Game= the three essentials upon Such a journey, are abundant, & convenient so that no travels need Suffer a movement for this work of either-

It has been Supposed that a military Port is necessary upon this Road, Somewhere near the Arkansas for the protection of our Trades from the Indians. As in lieu of Such a Port on the Road; to have a Corps Stationed as near possible to Serve on occasion may Require, to furnish escorts for the Caravans traveling to and from N: Mexico- Upon this Subject I have to Remark that it Seems to me very doubtful if the protection of escorts would be at all desired by the caravan-And as to the establishment of a Military Port; it happens that there is no Suitable position for one, on the whole Route, within the Territory of The U: States; at Such distance from and Settlements as to require Such protection- The most effectual method of protecting this Trade, I think, would be to break up the military establishment at Council Bluff, and Remove it to a portion not or above the entrance of the Kansas River, a little above the boundary lines of this State, and there garrison a Regiment, permanently-

From this Garrison escorts may be Sent out if necessary to protect the Trade up the Missouri & to N: Mexico, and it may very possibly happen that our frontier Settlements on the Missouri, may need Some Such protection from the mixed Indian population; about to be Settled near our borders under the auspices of the Leut. Government- ____ and of this Military establishment, Some very useful changes mighty be made in the Indian Department, particularly as Relates to the details of the Missouri Agency, which is , without doubt entirely too extensive, and consequently managed indifferently-

The Pawnee (who belong to this Agency) are among the most troublesome Indians on the Road to New Mexico- If a Special Agent were appointed to reside among them, and obliged actually to Reside among them, I believe they would be very easily restrained frm their accustomed attacks upon our People trading to & from N. Mexico- Indeed I may have with great truth Remark, that the whole of our Indian concern in this quarter, might be much better and much more cheaply controlled; if the Agents who are employed here by the Government, were Required to do their duty as the Law directs, that is, obliged to Spend much more of their time among the Indians than they do- There is Scarcely an Agency here, that may not with Woe propriety be denominated an _____ Sincere-

As it is not now my purpose to discuss this Subject, I merely Suffer myself to drop the above Remarks as in Some Sort commented with the interst of the New Mexican Trade; which I consider to be of Sufficient impornance to justify any feasible measure that I have Suffested for its protection & encouragement-

If I live to Return from my next Spring's excursion. I hope to be able to Settle at least from myself, Some very Seious doubts that I now entertain as to the _____ and proacticability of the Scheme to colonise the Indians in the wild Praires _____ of Missouri- My present indeprssions are, that the project is utterly impracticable and altogether inefficient even if it can be effected; I believe it will be productive of Misery & _____ to the Indians- injury to Missouri, immerse expense & utter disappointment to the Genaral Government- If I am not greatly mistaken in my knowledge of the Country proposed to be given up to those unfortunate wretches; it does not afford a Scope of habitable ground for Scarcely one Fourth of them- and if they should be placed there; they will fall to cutting each others throats (in _____

for the Small _____ (that are habitable) _____ upon our Settlements and thereby produce bloody War; which the General govt. must Suppress with force of arms- Or, Should they remain quiet for a term; it would only be for Such time as the government Shall Supply all their Wants, and arm them into Some _____ by military force- The final result however, much doubtless be, the destruction of the Indians; & owing the progress of the experiment, difficulties, and Suffering , and Expense without end.- For my part, I do most heartily Regret that Such an extension project was ever Set an _____, and that's it has been so heartily acted on- Could not the few Remnants of the Indian Nation have been tolerated and protected, and preserved, in the land of their Father's?- Much better would it have been, as I think, for the Genl. Govt. to have united its efforts with those of the State Govt. To preserve the Indians where they are- I am Sure, that with proper care & management this object may be easily effected in that way-

At all events I am much more than doubtful if it can ever be effected by locating the Indians and is proposed upon the great Western Provinces- I wish the Govt. Had ordered a more critical examination of the Country to be made under the direction of impartial and disinterested persons before any States had been taken to Remove any of the Indians to it- It is impossible to carry the thing into effect & if it were possible, I feel very sure that Missouri ought and must protect against it- I have no doubt of the good intention of most of those who foresee this plan, but they have been deceived; and I Really hope the thing may be at least Suspended for a time 'till more particular & correct information is obtained.- I do assure you I have no other views on interest in this Matter than a very natural feeling of apprehension as a frontier inhabitant ; and a very zealous desire that the Administration may not allow itself to be precipitated into an that may not be easily if at all corrected-

I forward you a Rough copy of my Notebook kept on my late journey to New Mexico; in the _____ that it may possibly afford you some amusement when you have nothing better to do than to look over it- I left a a similar diary at home containing Some observations and Remarks upon the Manner _____ & of the Inhabitant of New Mexico; this last war written for the _____ & amusement of my Wife, and might probably Serve to amuse Ann Eliza- and I may possibly Send her a copy-

I have been told Since I came here, that A.E. has given you another _____-if it's So I heartily with you both much joy- William has I presume grown to be quite a Stout lad by now, & no doubt advances in his education as he ought- I ___ of you my dear Sis, o present me work affectionately to A. E. , I trust she enjoys her full share of health and happiness- My late journey has very much improved my health; which I enjo the move, as my Wife Shares also the Same blessing.

Yr. truly&ever

How: J. S. Johnston.

G.C. Sibley