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Letter from George Sibley to Josiah Johnston, October 26, 1828

George Champlin Sibley
St. Charles, Missouri

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Saint Charles, Mo; 26. Octo: 1828

My dear Sir,

As the time draws nigh, when your home will be at Washington for a Season at least, where I am Sure of your address, I take the opportunity of an interval of quiet, whilst my family is out at a dinner Party, to have a little chat with you – The Several Letters you favd. me with just before you left Washington last Spring, were duly +thankfully received. I am Still your Debtor in my poor thanks, for your kind aid in arranging with the Treasury Dept. about my Debt +. Mr. Bates encourages me to hope that a first Settlement of that troublesome affair may be easily effected, agreeably to my Wishes, and I expect it to be entirely discharged in March next.

With this fair prospect, I begin to feel, as I Suppose a prisoner must feel, whose irons are about to _____ off, + his prison door thrown open: and like the Said prisoner, I am firm in the resolve, never again to put my Liberty in jeopardy in the Same way at least – Once more free, I shall tho' poor, indulge freely the hope of prospering in the common affairs of life, provided I have health, and can obtain employment – Many of my friends here would persuade me, that I ought to visit the Seat of Govt. this Winter, for the purpose of offering my Services in person +., and no one is more urgent than my friend Bates, who seems to be thoroughly convinced, from Something Mr. Clay Said to him, that I may expect Some employment in the Public Service; but thinks I had better go forward in person – Now altho' I am absolutely bound in duty to my family, + very Strongly urged by my circumstances, to put forward my claims, Such as they are, for Some employment in which I can benefit the Public Service, and earn a decent Support; I feel an almost invincible repugnance to use Such efforts as appear to be necessary, to effect that end. The truth is, I know myself to be utterly unqualified to push my way as a Suitor at Washington, amidst the crowds of hungry and obtrusive office hunters that are every Winter besetting the Public Offices – and was it not for the Circumstance that my habits, thoughts, experience +. clearly indicate, that I am better fitted for a Public functionary, than for private life; I Should most assuredly Set myself down quietly + contentedly at home – For me however, to abandon those pursuits that I have devoted myself to for So many years of my life, and which may be Said to be a material part of my education, would be the Same as if a tradesman Should give up his trade, and rely for Support, upon Some untried + fanciful Scheme – In Short, I Should decide at once to make the trip to Washington in December, if I did not dread the expense that must attend it, which I can but illy afford at present – Other considerations however besides the object just named, may oblige me to make the journey – I have a claim upon the Govt. for \$1500 for extra advances made on account of the Road to New Mexico; which ought to have been refunded me last winter; but which may even be Still another year neglected, unless I attend to it in person – It also Strikes me, that, altho' Mr. Bates is very Sanguine in his opinion, that he will easily arrange the affair at the Treasury, it may turn out to be more difficult than he imagines, + that assistance on the Spot may prove very useful. And Still another object would Seem to demand my personal attention, to wit, my Ft. Osage Claim, which is Still Suspended + unsettled at Mr. Graham's Office – It may be that all these considerations, ought to make me conclude at once, to go to Washington – I Shall turn the Subject over + over in my mind, and consider it fairly (?) in all its aspects; and if it Shall then appear proper, the trip Shall be made, even tho' I Shd. Suffer for it –

In addition to Margaret, Ann +Henry Sibley, we now have with us here, Mrs. McDonald, Mrs. +Mr. Lee, who arrived here yesterday from Alexandria, which place they left on the ___ Last. - They proceed in about a week, to their new Station up the Missouri, which is about 300miles from this place by Land- I Shall go with them as far as Ft. Osage, where I Still have a Stock of Asses, Horses +Cattle to attend to, - for the Sake of Speed, convenience + economy, we mean to make the journey in the Mail Coach, which runs as far as Liberty, about 40 Miles from the Garrison – Your Suggestions in relation to Master John Sibley, I have considered. But as I have not been able yet to provide a Suitable Situation for him at St. Louis or elsewhere, + being of opinion, that he must certainly derive advantage from a longer Stay at the School in Ohio; I have considered it best at any rate, to let him remain there ‘till Spring; when, Shd. I determine to go abroad this Winter, I may See him on my return home. And in that event, I Shall previously have Seen + conversed with you + Ann Eliza concerning him –

We are all in prime health here, and I promise you, we enjoy as much merriment, + can Show as many happy phizzes, (?) as are to be found any where –

I am directed by the whole bevy, Seven in all, to greet you, + yours affectionately for them - I have more than once had occasion, to envy you two, the large Share you possess, of the honest undisguised, affection + respect of all in my present inmates, so frequently are you the theme of their conversation, + grateful remembrance. – - The last we heard of Henry, he was Still fretting at Ft. Pike. His family was at Cant. (?) _____ when Mr. Lee left there; extremely dissatisfied. –

This hard tour of duty in the commencement of his Military life; will entitle Henry to Some future favour I Suppose, + probably turn out for his advantage – Father was well + active, tho’ his whole family have been much Sick during the last Summer –

It will no doubt be pretty nearly ascertained, by the knowing (?) over, before this reaches you, who is to be the next President – The friends of Mr. Adams in their quarter, generally expect that he will be reelected, by a Small majority – We Shall be unable to give him a Single Vote in Missouri or Illinois, I fear – Both candidates are unpopular; Mr. Adams rather the Most So. in fact we have had up.hill work here, altogether, in effecting what has been done - If we could have three months longer, I am confident, the Majority would be for Mr. A – It will not probably be very great against him; tho’ it is certain that he owes all he has here, to the influence of Mr. Clay’s Name – Ask in any part of the State What chance Gen. Jackson would have if Mr. Clay was the opposing Candidate?+ the instant reply is “No chance at all”–

Missouri loses much by the Silly exchange of Mr. Bates for Mr. Pettis (?) - The latter is no more to be compared with the former, in any respect, than a Wax taper to the blessed Sun; tho’ he is a decent young Man, and I do not doubt will disappoint Col. Benton in his expectation of using him for a Tool – Benton chuckles mightily over this victory, which he modestly ascribes entirely to his influence. Nothing can be more false however than this; for the fact is, the Colonel has no personal popularity in Missouri, tho’ he certainly does possess a good deal of adroitness at Management, and knows how to use the influence of his Official Station to the best advantage –

Mr. Bates lost his election, first, because he is a friend of the Administration, Second, because he is opposed to the graduation Land Bill. Third his friends never dreaming that there could be any danger from Such opponents as he had, made little or no effort, a great many neglected to vote at all; while on the Jackson Side every vote at least was counted once. Fourth, Many false Stories were Secretly circulated agt. Mr. Bates, too late to be contradicted. And Fifth +not least. The whole weight +influence of the Indian Dept. at St. Louis, was exerted with unusual zeal against Mr. Bates, an account of his known Hostility to that overgrown nest of extravagance + corruption, and an account of his deadly hostility to the administration – Thus Mr. Bates lost his election, tho' confessedly the most Popular Man in Missouri, + deservedly so too –

I have been frequently greatly tempted, to drop a hint or two to Mr. Clay, concerning the Indian Dept. at St. Louis; which is emphatically a Scandal to the Govt. + the Country, and is So deemed I venture to Say, by all the candid + intelligent who know any thing about its concerns – Perhaps there is nothing that operates more to the prejudice of the Administration in this State + in Illinois, than the Indian Office at St. Louis – Its utter uselessness is Seen at a glance by all, and its exorbitant extravagance, is the Subject of universal remark; and what aggravates the thing the more, its head, and all the innumerable understrappers, (?) clerks, +. _ . _ . are to a Man inimical to Mr. Adams +Mr. Clay, and really appear to Strive to render the establishment as obnoxious as they can to the People, in order to aid the cause of Jackson.

Mr. Clay's friends here, blame him much, for his neglect of this crying evil – If I had the honour of his acquaintance, I certainly Should long ago have used the freedom to have written him of these things. I did urge Geyer (?) + Some others to write him, + perhaps they may have done it – With old Gen. Clark, I am on good terms enough, + would be one of the last Men in the world to Say ought against his character as a Man + a Gentleman. But the old Man, always extremely weak, has passed into his dotage, and is absolutely incompetent to discharge the duties of any Public Office for the Public benefit – His present office, is as I have Said, utterly useless, worse than useless - If I Shd. be at Washington this winter; the Committee on _____ element, may be able probably to discover another item or two for their reprehension - I am amazed that they Shd. have overlooked So conspicuous an object, as the Office at St. Louis – at least I Should have been if I did not well understand, that their censures were not deemed applicable to their own Party – If a Strict Scrutiny could be had of the Ind. Dept. . I am persuaded it would be found, that with the exception of Some of the remote Agencies. The Whole expense is just so much lost +thrown away – that the Public Service is very little benefitted by it. and that as regards the Poor Indians, it is the greatest curse that could light on them – I cannot be mistaken when I Say, that the whole establishment ought to be uprooted, and entirely new modeled – The first Step is to divert the Subject, of the air of Mystery and Superstition that has for so long a time been artfully thrown over it. Remove this false veil, + all is plain and Simple, + I believe firmly, that when this is effected, Our Govt. will never have any more trouble with the affair of our Indians – A very Simple, + a very useless, as well as expensive, Ind. Agt. Said to me the other day, He was Sorry to hear me express the wish that all the Indians were either civilized or destroyed by an Act of God, for Said he what Should all we of the Ind. Dept. do if there were no Indians, or if they all lived quietly +happily? –

Remember me kindly + affectionately

To Ann E. +William.

Yrs. very truly

G. c. Sibley

Hon. J. S. Johnston.