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Letter from George Sibley to Samuel Sibley, September 16, 1808

George Champlin Sibley

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MHS
Sibley Papers
A.L.S. GCS to SHS

Camp near Prairie de Feu, (?)
up the River Missouri
September 16th 1808

My dear brother,

Since I wrote you from the City of Washington (about the 2nd of May last) I have been so very much hurried and my destination so uncertain that I did not feel much in a mood for letterwriting even if I had time. All I would have said between the date and conclusion of a letter would have been an account of my good health, of the bad roads, my stage coach company = ions and such objects which might as well enough be (?) treasure (?) for the amusement of an hour of perfect leisure, but which I could not possibly consent to sacrifice time to, that called for much more serious devotion.

I left Washington the 26th of May, got to Baltimore the same day. left that town the 29th in the stage for Phil.. got to Phil. the 30th to breakfast. left Phil the 31st in the stage for Pittsburg, passed through Lancaster, Harrisburgh, Carlisle – burgh, Chambersburgh Bedford, Somerset & Greensburgh & arrived Pittsburg.. got a P boat that was then waiting for us & hired hands and set of down the Ohio on the 9th – banked (?) Wheeling the 11th. waited then 'till the 23rd for the arrival of some Indian stores from Washington which having rec'd proceeded on the voyage.. got to Marietta the 24th at Lewistown the 27th Cincinnati the 28th Louisville (the falls) the 30th.- Then I went with W. John Nisbet brother of my friend Milers (?) Nisbet, but up at the same Tavern with him, enjoyed his company & Sundry days elapsed Punch with him – left Louisville the 3d of July b men of the town asked me to stay to dinner the 4th but was too much in a hurry to accept their polite invitation – got to the Red Banks (?) the 7th Fort Massac (?) the 11th the mouth of the Ohio the 12th. found the Mississippi exceeding low and very difficult to ascend, for the first 4 or 5 days did not average more than 6 miles, got to Cape Gireardeau the 18th. – St. Genevieve the 26th on the 29th two of my men got drowned. On the 31st arrived at St. Louis the distance from St. Louis to the mouth of the Ohio is 190 miles which we were 20 days going Judge from this this what must be the rapidity of the Mississippi & the difficulty of ascending it – On the 1st of August I went up to the Camp on the

Missouri to prepare for my departure up that river. found the Troops ready to start & only waiting for me. I immediately set about packing up the Goods belonging to the public (which I was directed to pack up) and on the 8th had the boats loaded (six in number) & they set off on the 11th. I went to St. Louis to arrange some business then , from whence I rode across the country to St. Charles, when I met the Boats and joined the party, which consisted of Captain Clemson's Company of U. States Infantry & in complete order – (81 Men commanded by Captain Clemson & Lt. Lorrimer. We had fine weather & the river in good order, so that we averaged about 15 Miles a day which is considered pretty good voyaging on this river. We arrived here the 2nd & encamped.

On the 4th Brigadier Gen. Clark (He who was with Lewis to the Pacific) joined us with 80 Mounted Militia, on the 5th the Gen. detached Capt. Boon with an Interpreter to the Osages to recommend to them to abandon their old villages & come & settle themselves in the vicinity of this place. You must understand the Osages have lately been committing some violent depredations on our Frontiers, for which they have fallen under the displeasure of our Gov't. In a grand Council at St. Louis, Gov'r Lewis told their Chiefs that their was to be a military & trading establishment here, and that those who came & settled near here would be considered friendly to the U.S. & protected, those who refused to come, would be considered enemies & would certainly be cut off. It is about 120 miles from this to the Osages.

The Troops (Militia & all) set to work to build a fort, and you can hardly form an idea. How cheerful & pleasing a sight it is to see 200 Men cutting a Village out of an almost impenetrable forest. the spot selected for this important establishment is 330 Miles by Water above the Mouth of the River, about 220 by land from St. Louis Situated on a high bluff 70 feet above high water Mark on the left bank, at a point which the River is very narrow (about 350 yds, its common width is from 6 to 15 hundred ft from which we have a most charming view of 4 or 5 Miles up & down the Slope Runs back to the Prairie about a Mile which abounds with a great variety of game & with fruits. The soil is extremely fertile & the timber straight & very plentiful consisting of Black Oak chiefly. Cotton Wood, Hycory, Blck Walnut, Linn Ashes, Mulberry, White Oak & many other kinds. An extensive Ridge runs back here (?) from the Bluffs forming most beautiful Situation for Fields etc (?)

The buildings intended for the Establishment of which I have the charge will be very handsomely Situated just on the brow of

of the Hill overlooking the river and an extensive bottom part of which I have cultivate, then buildings I shall see to have comfortable & convenient, & the one to be appropriated for a trading House will be larger & handsomer. – This is an outline of my present prospects as relates to any personal comforts & conveniences, as well as of my past p ; I am fearful they will be tiresome to you but there was no other way that I could conveniently adopt to let you at once into the minutiae of my affairs of this fort. You will perhaps think with me that the loss of civilized society is ill requited by the advantages I have enumerated; indeed I too often make this reflection I believe, and am too apt to dwell on it. The result will be perhaps, that I shall after a year or two resign my Situation, and go to Natchitoches to farming; tho from present prospects I feel pretty Sure that the next year my Salary will be raised & my situation be vastly more pleasant; This will become a great place of rendezvous for the Indians of a great many Tribes, to come and trade, and of course the Trading House of which I have the Agency, will be important in proportion. The Indians to the number of about 5000 talk of coming to Settle near this fort. the Osages are already come to the number of ab't 1800 Souls. So that I expect to trade this Winter to the Amt. of near \$40,000 which Sum I hope to realize in Furs & Peltries before the of next May – Perhaps the being busily engaged trading with the Indians, particularly Some of the handsome young Squaws, may wean me from Society, if so, it may turn out that I shall remain here Several years. for surely if I meet with a Situation at once pleasant & profitable, it would be foolishness to exchange it haphazard for another. Happiness is the phantom we are all in the pursuit of, but never overtake; If I can get contentment I shall be content. – I had the pleasure to receive your letter dated 7th just a few days before I left St. Louis; I am very glad that you have sold the Mose (?) So well, as it enables you to pay Mr Winslow a larger amt. than we at first calculated on; when you have actually made this payment, I will thank you to advise me of it. I remitted Mr Winslow from Washington which with the \$125 on 30 dols that I expect you will pay him will very nearly Settle my acct. with him – You mention your determination to remove to Louisiana; I cannot but heartily approve of going places and hope most sincerely that it may So fall (?) out that we may Settle near to each other. I look forward with

much pleasure to the day, when I Shall commence Farmer on Red River
Red River, and will (?) cherish this hope that I shall do So at the end
of 2 or 3 years at farthest. My first year here will be but of little profit
to me; that is I shall not be able to lay up much. It took half a years
pay to lay in my Stores for Housekeeping etc (?) & it will take nearly the
other half to complete my establishment and pay off my debts. But
I shall begin the next year with an increase of Salary and shall have
but very few if any expences to defray; and the 3d year will be
nearly the Same, if I should stay here that long. – I join heartily
with you in the wish to keep up a brisk correspondence, you can easily
imagine that Such an arrangement would be to me now doubly valu=
=able. direct your Letters to me as usual to “St. Louis Terr’y Louisiana”
until you hear from me again which it will be when I get a little
better Settled & in Winter quarters. I am now living in a Tent &
the mornings & Nights are getting quite cool. I had forgotten to
mention that among many other Letters which I found for me at St. Louis
was one from you dated 29th dec. last. – I also found a number of
old letters from Father but I have rec’d none from him of a later
date. You will probably See Major Owen, if you do, give my
best regards to him; and tell him “I am very well & hope he is in the
Same” That I am much pressed for time or I would write him
a whole letter on purpose to tell him So (for I Should have very
little to say to him). Remember me to all acquaintances
Mr Cochran in particular & family. I find I have fairly wasted
a sheet of papers – it is written in such & under repeated in=
=terruptions that I fear you will not make much of it.
At all it is all you’ll get from me just now. It is as
yet uncertain whether I can write Mother in Law by this
opportunity, therefore I will thank you to send her and the
children my love, & let them know what I am it.
I fully intended to write her now but the cursed Indians are =
= in Such crowds may possibly put it out of my power. At
any rate I could (?) tell her nothing more than you are now enabled to do except
to give my love to the Girls & best respects to Miss Nessfield, Mr Winslow
& family, Miss King

I remain y’r affectionate
Geo. C. Sibley

Mr Sam H. Sibley

[Copyist's note: I am copying this from someone else's transcript. This transcriber apparently left blank spaces for indecipherable words, rather than underlined spaces. It is not always clear what the transcriber's intentions were, so I have attempted to reproduce his/her transcription as closely as possible even where his intention is not fully clear, including the divisions between lines of text, with the exception of page boundaries/numbers which are almost certainly not part of the original document. The transcriber also inserted question marks above uncertain words; this proved difficult to reproduce, so I have put "floating" question marks into parenthesis and moved them to immediately follow the word which they reference.]