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Letter from George Sibley to Samuel Sibley, September 28, 1816

George Champlin Sibley
Fort Osage

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Fort Osage September 28th, 1816.

My dear Brother,

Your two Letters dated in May and July are both recd. the latter a short time since. You complain that I have not written you for a long time, you are wrong. I have written to you not less than twice or thrice since my return to this place in June last – At present being very busy about my quarterly reports, I propose to confine myself pretty much to answering that part of your last letter in which you express some wish to remove to this country, and embark with me in the Mercantile business at St. Louis – I feel no hesitation at all in recommending this country to you as a healthy one; nor do I believe you or your family would experience the smallest inconvenience from the change of climate – it is I think established by the experience of thousands that removals from a Warm to a Cold climate, are by no means hazardous, altho' removals from cold to hot climates are so- Our climate is not very cold, we begin [sic] to sit by our fire about the middle of October, and discontinue it about the middle of April – early gardening begins in March, Peaches are ripe in the two last weeks of August, Apples in Septem. both of these excellent fruits we have in great abundance, and of the finest kinds; we have also fine Plums, Cherries, Apricots, Nectarines, Pears, Quinces, Currants, Grapes, Gooseberries, Pacons, [sic] Hazlenuts, [sic] Walnuts, Parsimmons, [sic] Paupaws, [sic] Raspberries, Strawberries, Dewberries, Blackberries, Mulberries, all in abundance – Our country produces better Beef, Mutton, Pork and Venison – Our fields yield abundant crops of Corn, Wheat, Rye, Barley, Buckwheat, Sweet and Irish Potatoes, Peas and Beans, Oats and Rice and Cotton – The average market price of Necessaries at St Louis, may be stated at this time as follows – Beef 5 cts. Pork 8 cts Mutton 8 cts Venison about 1-1/2 to 2 dollars a carcass, [sic] Turkeys [sic] 50 cts. apiece – Fowls 1/6 to 1/4 of a Dollar ea. Butter 12-1/2 cts. a pound, Eggs 12-1/2 cts. a doz. Potatoes 50 cts. Corn 33-1/3 cts. – Oats 40 cts – Bacon 10 cts. Superfine Flour 8 Dollrs. Salt \$1.50/100 pr Bu. Brown Sugar 25 cts. Loaf 50 cts. – Coffee 50 cts. – Such a House as that which Father lived in when I was at Natchitoches will rent for about \$50 pr Month – Town Lots containing less than a quarter of an acre (naked) sell for from 1 to 3 thousand dollars according to situation. Bricks are \$10 pr. M. Pine Planks from \$3. to \$4-1/2 pr 100 feet – I have a carpenter now employed at \$45 pr. Mo. and fired him – another one gets \$40 pr Mo. and found – Common

laborers \$20 pr Mo. and found – [see note d below] Firewood at St. Louis is about \$3 pr Cord – if bought in the winter as used it costs at least \$6 a Cord. St. Louis is well supplied with excellent water – Ice Houses are getting common there now – the town is improving as rapidly as any town on the continent, and the country around it increasing vastly in population.

The prices above quoted are the very highest, and are to be understood as retail prices, except those relating to rent and building. Beef may be bought in the country at 2 1/2 and Pork at 3 cts pr. lb. on foot. Groceries fluctuate very much, depending almost entirely on the New Orleans prices – freightage from New Orleans to St. Louis is now about 4 dollrs pr. Hund. [sic] it will be reduced to about 3 when the business increases so as to employ Steam Boats – I understand one is soon expected at St. Louis from N. O. – Should you determine on moving, you may no doubt get a comfortable passage up the river from Natchez in a Steamboat by making proper enquiries there or at New Orleans. A Steam boat has not long since made a trip from New Orleans to Louisville in 25 days. it would require about the same time to come to St. Louis – The Trading Barges usually take from 30 to 70 days to come from N. O. to St. Louis – at present Houses are very scarce at St. Louis owing to the great influx of strangers, and new families come there to live – building is going on very briskly tho’ – the tavern rates of boarding pr month is \$18. There are several pretty good boarding Houses, some of which have taken families to board at about \$12 ½ or \$15 pr Mo. with allowance for bedding, servants, &c. Household furniture Such as Tables, Chairs, Sideboard &c comes I believe by the way of Pittsburgh, when [sic, clearly “where” is intended as that is the only reading that makes sense in this context] such things are now factured [sic, see note c below] extensively. Feathers are plenty at about 50 cts. a pound at St. Louis. Sometimes they are cheaper – Iron castings, crockery &c are always to be had at St. Louis. There are now some pretty good preparatory Schools at St. Louis; one of them a Lancastrian School – no doubt a well endowed Academy will be established soon; Congress has by Law given a handsome property to the Corporation of St. Louis for the purpose of establishing a college. A respectable clergyman has been engaged I am informed at a Salary of 1500 a year to superintend an academy at St. Louis and to preach. You need be under no apprehensions therefore on the Subject of Schools.

There are many french [sic] inhabitants at St. Louis, but they are less numerous than the Americans now, and have but little influence (as a party) in public affairs; generally speaking, there is much harmony (I believe) among the French and American families, tho' they do not associate much together in private circles, on account of the difference of language – In general the Society of St. Louis is pretty good and daily improving – Our dancing assemblies last winter were well attended from 40 to 75 Ladies and as many Gentlemen; American and French about equal proportions – I have thus given you every information about St. Louis, that can be useful to you, tho' in a very incoherent manner; and in order to afford you all the light I can on the Subject, I have directed the Missouri Gazette (printed at St. Louis) to be sent you 8 weeks; from which you will be able to gather considerable knowledge of the commercial and other business of the place. Of the progress of improvement generally in this Territory, I informed you in a former Letter – I am decidedly in favor of this Country in preference to all others – the prospects of easy and good living, Health and Independence seem to me to be extremely flattering – Therefore I do not hesitate to recommend you to come here (all things convenient) with as little delay as need be – In offering you this advice I have as much as possible divested? [see note e below] myself of all prejudices or partialities and have particularly been on my guard against letting my ardent wishes for your Society influence me. I now come to answer your other enquiry. “whether I am disposed to enter into the Mercantile business with you at St. Louis?” I have within a month past had the same question put to me by three other persons, one of whom is my wife's Father, Col. Easton – but I have not taken the matter into proper consideration until very lately – Col. Easton has merely asked me the question and has hinted at furnishing some Cash, say \$6000. I have just answered his proposition, and have agreed to embark with him, provided it will be prudent, now there are so many merchants already at St. Louis – I have mentioned to him your proposal; and have proposed to take you in as a partner, and have told him I should write to you on the subject and get you to write to me more explicitly – stating the stock you can contribute &c – for my part, I have no stock but rely on credit, and I have said to Col. E. that I presume you can have a Credit in New York where you are known. My wish is, if we go into the business to begin with a good stock, say at least \$25,000 worth of Goods. I should calculate on quitting the business as soon as ever I could be able to settle

myself comfortably [sic] on a farm near St. Louis – to effect which object is the only inducement I have to go into Trade – Enough has been said on the Subject at present – I am willing to leave my present employment if I can find another equally productive and I shall be glad to join you and Col. Easton or either of you in merchandizing at St. L uis [sic] and St. Charles if we can agree upon the terms; Easton and I are near each other, and can communicate frequently on the Subject – You must make up your mind fully &c. state (?) [see note e below] to me as soon as you can what you will agree to do, be explicit and particular so that we fairly understand you – After we have heard from you, Col. E. and I will you what is resolved on and if we agree; to it we will go and some provision be you against your arrival at St. Louis with your family –

Let me know very much in detail your plans; and state what extent of Credit you may be able to obtain in New York, let your Letter be entirely on this Subject, unmixed with any other. I shall avail myself of some other oppty. to notice the other parts of your last letter respecting Father. In his last Letter to me he says something of taking a trip to see this country – You must remember me to him, Henry and Ann E. and Judge J – give my best to Margaret . Mary sends hers also and desires you to kiss the children for her. She as well as myself will be extremely happy to have you and yours near us – We are in good health and are now busy preparing comforts for the approaching winter – write very soon.

Affectionately

G. C. Sibley

Mr. Saml. H. Sibley.

[Copyist's notes: a) I am copying this from someone else's typescript. This transcriber apparently left blank spaces to represent words that could not be made out. I have reproduced this whenever it could be observed, although it was not always clear whether or not a word was missing.

b) "Sic" is added in square brackets by me following words that are misspelled in the transcript; however, I cannot determine whether the (apparent) errors are the transcriber's or the original author's.

c) Based on context and on my experience with George Sibley's handwriting, I suspect that the words rendered "now factured" should actually read "manufactured." There is, however, no proof of this since I do not have the original manuscript.

d) The word "found" does not make sense in this context, causing me to suspect that it may have been erroneously transcribed. There is, however, nothing to show this for certain.

e) Probably the transcriber added this question mark to indicate that he wasn't sure if the word had been transcribed correctly.]