

Lindenwood University

Digital Commons@Lindenwood University

---

George Champlin Sibley Papers

George and Mary Easton Sibley Papers

---

6-1-1838

## Letter from George Sibley to Hiram Chamberlain, June 1, 1838

George Champlin Sibley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/george>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

---

Lindenwood, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1838.

Rev. Sir: Your 8<sup>th</sup> PROOF contained in the 29<sup>th</sup> paragraph is designed to bolster up, by some show of argument and legal erudition (“Constitutional Law”) the monstrous pretension that your appeal to the General Assembly from the sentence of the Synod of Missouri declaring the election of your three Elders “IRREGULAR AND VOID”, arrested the force of the act; and authorizes you and your Elders to continue in the exercise of authority you had assumed (but annulled by Synod) of Minister and Ruling Elders in and over the church of St. Charles, until the General Assembly shall order otherwise. In my note to you 24<sup>th</sup> January I have very fully discussed this whole subject, more particularly in reference to an assertion you make (in this 29<sup>th</sup> paragraph, near the end) claiming the direct sanction of the General Assembly of ’37 of your strange pretension. My remarks on this subject (pages 19 & 21 of my narrative) are the particular objects of your criticism. You claim to have arrested by your appeal, the whole force of Synod’s sentence: and have based your claim on Constitutional Law. Let us examine this very curious argument of yours. The Synod adjudges that those Elders were irregularly appointed, and FOR THAT REASON annul—make void—vacate—nullify—render of no validity or effect—abrogate—abolish (these are all synonymous terms used by Webster) their election of appointment. The Constitutional Law of the Presbyterian Church, which the ONLY LAW THAT we have now to do with, provides this: “If a sentence of suspension, or excommunication from church privileges, or OF DEPOSITION FROM OFFICE be the sentence appealed from, it shall be considered as in force until the appeal shall be issued.”—that is to say, such sentence shall be in force until otherwise ordered by the higher tribunal appealed to. This is the Law.

You admit that “the act of Synod was designed to annul the election” of those Elders—but insist that the Law cannot apply to the case, because the word DEPOSE is not used to express the design of the Synod to DIVERT those irregularly appointed of their office (tho’ it WAS their intention as you admit, so to divert.) and that, therefore, they might continue in the exercise of the interdicted office. You say that the technical word DEPOSE is only applied to the implication of CRIME—perhaps it may be so: and that may have been the reason why Synod used a CORRELATIVE TERM to signify their intention of diverting the three “new Elders” of their office—no crime having been imputed to them, further than is fairly to be implied from the adjudged fact, that they obtained their offices illegally. The illegality of the election is a settled point in the judgment of Synod (and Presbytery) which clearly places your “new Elders” precisely in the position they could have no more right to exercise the office of Elders after the Synod’s sentence of annulment, than they had before their election.

To DISCUSS such a proposition as you have set up is really no better than silly child’s play. I can scarcely believe you’re serious in advancing as CONSTITUTIONAL LAW and common sense, so preposterous a doctrine as this 29<sup>th</sup> paragraph contained. When, therefore, I say that you and your “new Elders” have placed yourselves “in an attitude very like defiance towards the law of the Presbyterian church,” by continuing in the exercise of the offices from which the Synod of Missouri has by its solemn judgment DEBARED you—in effect DEPOSED you. I had only to appeal to the Law, and the facts and evidence, fully to sustain the truth of the assertion. TO DEPOSE means sometimes “TO DEGRADE”—sometimes “TO DIVERT OF OFFICE,” without any degradation—depending always of course, upon the cause. In the case of your “new Elders”, they were DEPOSED, divested of office for the specific cause of irregularity of their election; but there was no degradation—Nothing like CRIME was charged against them. The necessary effect

of deposition, is to deprive of office. And such also is the necessary effect of annulling the election under which office is claimed—in both cases the official relation is alive dissolved—in both the office-holder is debarred the office, and has no right any longer to exercise its rights or authority. Even where ONE is deposed for irregularity in appointment merely and ANOTHER for some criminal offence—they both stand on exact equality, in as far as their connection with office goes—they are both OUT OF OFFICE: and one has just as much legal right to continue action and authority as the other, and neither possesses any better right, than anyone else, so long as the sentence of deprivation remains valid—and its validity remains NECESSARILY, in law and common sense, until repealed by the proper authority.

For good cause a sentence of deprivation of office may be repealed, either by the tribunal pronouncing it, or upon appeal by a superior authority. In YOUR case, the General Assembly must decide—and until that supreme Indiciary shall so order, I maintain, Sir in the face of all your profound learning and logic: that the exercise by you and your new Elders of the offices of Minister and Ruling Elders in and over the church of St. Charles, in “an act of usurpation, and in violation of the settled law of the Presbyterian “church.”

And this expression of my conviction does not prove me to be actuated by “party feeling” or by any other motive to mislead others, as you would have your readers to believe is the case. I trust Mr. Chamberlain, that I am incapable of groveling so low, as to identify myself in any sense in a PARTY CONTENTION with you. Tho’ I shall continue without any disguise, to object against your unlawful proceedings towards the first Presbyterian church of St. Charles—and if I think fit, to publish facts as they transpire in that connection. This I have done, and can do again, without any PARTY connection or any PARTY FEELING WHATEVER.

Your constitutional temperament of mind as it appears to me, renders it extremely difficult for you to keep the spirit of party out of your bosom whenever your views and interests happen to conflict sharply with those of others. You are then too apt to straightway erect yourself very consequentially into A PARTY: and judging your opponents, in opinion by yourself, at once set them up as an ANTAGONISTIC party. Such is not my nature or disposition I assure you. “The Demon of Party Spirit” I am thankful to be able with truth to say has not obtained such dominion over my better feelings, as to beguile me into his narrow and crooked paths.—

Your NINTH and last proof, exhibits me before your readers, in the ungracious attitude of reviling “respectable and worthy citizens” for this purpose you quote from my 19<sup>th</sup> page. And here again you quote only partially: just enough FROM BOTH ENDS OF A SENTENCE to suit your purpose. What I have stated IN THE WHOLE SENTENCE, I still believe to be true, as to the violent anti-Presbyterianism of some of the persons alluded to, and yet I think I may still regard them, as I certainly do, in other respects “respectable and worthy citizens” as the world goes. YOUR narrow party feelings and prejudices, would doubtless produce different “IMPRESSIONS” on YOUR mind. Whilst I sincerely pity you for this infirmity (the natural progenitor of obstinate pugnacity) I must decline being judged by your standard. You think fit, by way of illustration, to make allusion to a certain report made to Presbytery in 1835 by Messrs Lindsay, Black and Watson, Elders; and Jordan and Copes, Deacons, in which they say “that a party have called in unbelievers and SCOFFERS to vote down the church”—(I have not the document at hand, and adopt YOUR quotation). This you have lugged in very evidently, to obtain grace in the sight of your supporters, out of the church. It is a sort of indirect denial of the statement you quote, as to its truth—a kind of vindication of “THE CONGREGATION OF ST. CHARLES.” A little piece of

Jesuitism, to produce the impression, that You at least entertain too good an opinion of this community (except those who oppose you) to believe any of them to be SCOFFERS or to have been "called in" to vote down the church. This kind of electioneering demagogism, suits not, in my humble opinion, with your sacred vocation. Since you have dragged the matter up it may be out of place for me to inform you how the charge you have quoted from the report to our Presbytery, had its origin and upon what particular fact it was founded. Up to the time of the "affair of Mr. Wood" and AT that time, many of those "who contributed to the support of the Gospel" in St. Charles, claimed the right of suffrage, in the election of Pastor and ministers for a stated supply, in the Presbyterian church; and the claim was at least tacitly allowed, tho' by some objected to as irregular and improper. It is within my perfect recollection, that at an excited meeting about the re-invention of Mr. Wood, several individuals professedly anti-Presbyterian—notoriously anti-Christian—and at least, a Catholic by preference, took an immediate and active interest in the proceedings, for the avowed purpose of thwarting Mr. Lindsay, and for the mere "fun of the thing" to kick up a row in the church of St. Charles." Money was furnished to several persons, who might justly be called "unbelievers and SCOFFERS" that they might "contribute to the support of the Gospel," and thus entitle themselves to vote on the occasion—I do not believe, nor ever did, that either Mr. Wood or Mr. Cayce had any knowledge at the time, or this intermeddling, or but very few, if any of the members of the church: tho' the report DOES say as much as to charge SOME with having known it. Now whether any such attempt was made at YOUR pretended ELECTION in February '35, at which persons not church members were allowed to vote for you; and to which allusion is made in the report referred to, I am not able to say. If such was the fact, precedent in "Mr. Wood's affair" was probably used for some solus of justification or excuse. All such interferences of the "congregation of Saint Charles" in our Presbyterian elections, have been entirely discounted and disallowed, since your famous election on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1835 by thirty four votes of the church and congregation."

Your occupy only six pages in setting forth your NINE PROOFS of the falsity of my narrative—of my recklessness of the truth, and your own immaculate purity. In my essay to vindicate my narrative, much more space than six or six times six pages has been required. At the conclusion of your specifications, you triumphantly ask your readers if you have not fully established the truth of your proposition, that my narrative (History, as you call it in order to dub me the "HISTORIAN") is "utterly unworthy of his confidence."? The decisions of this question, I am now perfectly willing Mr. Chamberlain to leave to your own conscience; but more so to the good sense and candid judgment of your readers, even with no other lights than my narrative and your cross-examination, with my first two notes of 24<sup>th</sup> January and 17<sup>th</sup> February—I cannot and do not, expect, however, that very many of your readers, especially those who are strangers, to whom you address yourself more particularly, will ever see more of this controversy, that you IMPARTIALITY may allow; for as I have elsewhere told you, I shall not trouble myself to publish it.

You warn us all that you have yet in serve many more PROOFS, but think the NINE you have presented quite enough and to spare, except for those refractory readers who cannot be satisfied with ANY thing from your pen. All such you confidently refer to that world where no doubts can exist: WHERE, as you would have us to believe, your NINE PROOFS will be found in

the blasé of light and truth—MY conviction, I very much fear, must be postponed until those PROOFS are illuminated.

In the 32<sup>nd</sup> paragraph you take occasion to give vent to your spleen against my respected friends Watson and Lindsay, in terms that utterly defy comment. For a minister of the Gospel, (of your pretensions) deliberately to write and PUBLISH bitter innuendos in reference to the ruling Elders in the church, is to say the least of it, revolting to the feelings of every sincere follower of the blessed Redeemer.

The very conspicuous martial position that you assign me in the 33<sup>rd</sup> paragraph, proves you to be no less a Poet than Critic; and you have without scruple used the Poet's license of dealing exclusively in fiction. Your fancy sketch has not even the IMPERFECTION of being "FOUNDED ON FACTS".

If I understand the DRIFT of your 34<sup>th</sup> paragraph, it amounts to a general complaint to your readers that your opponents, THE MONORITY, do most cruelly and unjustly tyrannize over, and persecute you and your friends; although you and they constitute a large MAJORITY, denying you your rightful advantages and privileges of evidence, appeal, etc., together, this paragraph is a curiosity in its way and the piteous complain therein set forth is not less curious. I can account for its ridiculous absurdity in no other rational, charitable way, than upon the conjecture that you were still soaring on your PEGASUS, with your Poetaster's cap and wreath, yet encircling your brow. So far as I am in opposition to your course as a public man; I have already sufficiently "defined my position" and need not here say another word in that connection. And in reply to your charges against your other opponents in our church, I believe the language that I believed applicable when I wrote the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph (of the 23<sup>rd</sup> page) of my narrative, still applies in all its force and meaning, not excepting the concluding clause. For the sentiment expressed in that clause (part of which your quote and comment in your 35<sup>th</sup> paragraph) I am wholly responsible; and tho' I sincerely deplore the still existing evil as therein described, and am by no means disposed to shrink from whatever share of the blame justly falls upon me; or to exonerate any others, who like me, may be classed in the unhappy category alluded to, from THEIR due share, yet I must remind you, Rev. Sir., that I describe the repulsive influence and feelings as affecting MUTUALLY the two PARTIES (as you designate yourself and opponents). You admit the existence of the evil in its full extent, but appear disposed to cast the whole reproach upon your opponents.—

Can you imagine Rev. Sir, that the harsh and vindictive language you have indulged in towards those who disapprove and oppose your views and pretensions have, in your several publications (to say nothing of your wanton attacks upon me, or of your sayings and doings elsewhere) could, in the very nature of things, have any other tendency than to produce just that very MUTUAL feelings of estrangement and repulsion that actually exists, and that I have alluded to? Why, Sir, even whilst you were PENNING expression of pious sorrow and lamentation over this unhappy state of feeling in the church of St. Charles, YOU DIPPED YOUR PEN IN GALL, and used language infinitely more likely to perpetuate strife and disturbance than to promote peace and concord. Under such circumstances, can you possibly entertain the slightest reasonable expectation, that your opponents will ever approach you with open arms and contrite spirits, and crouch to your cold and repulsive and haughty bearing? Surely not. If WE have thrown ONE barrier in the way YOU, Sir, have been the cause of MANY more. "First

cast the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

I have just learned, whilst closing my unpleasant and very irksome task of reviewing your pamphlet, that you are now absent at Philadelphia prosecuting your appeal from Synod, before the General Assembly now sitting; and that you are not expected to return to St. Charles for several weeks to come—this will afford me some excuse, if any be necessary, for some delay in making copies of this and my two last communications of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> for your use. Not a line of what I have written to you shall be seen by any other eye than your own until the whole of my review shall be fairly and fully before you. And I hope, Sir you will appreciate properly my motive for using this form of reply to your pamphlet, in preference to "A PRINTED BOOK". It has been adopted partly for my own convenience (consulting my own perfect leisure) but more especially with the view of laying before you in this quiet manner, my full answers; in SOME hopes that I might thus induce you to retract the numerous errors that I have been able "from the record" to point out in your last publication.

If, in this review, I have been somewhat personal in some places, you must remember, Rev. Sir, that your own examples was before me, tho' by no means my model. A very bad example we must admit: and which I do not plead as any justification for myself, tho' alas for poor human nature! It may possibly serve ME (tho' not you) as some colour of palliation. And now, Rev. Sir, I gladly dismiss your "CROSS examination" and with not particular regret, take my final leave of YOU.

Yr. Mo. Obt. Svt.,  
Geo. C. Sibley