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12-24-1832

## Letter from William Russell to George Sibley, December 24, 1832

William Russell

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Post of Arkansas in the Territory of  
Arkansas, evening of 24th, Dec. 1832.

Major George C. & Mrs. May E. Sibley. –

My dear friends - -

Leaving from St. Louis, arrived in 4 days at mouth of White River (which is only 20 miles by land from this place) we were detained there about a week before we could get a steam boat passage up to this place. That it was only yesterday, that I left Ann (in good health) with her mother & grand mother.

Beginning as I do on a large sheet, shews an intent to write a long letter, and though it may turn out so when I close it, I feel as if I had not much to say, of very material interest to you, but like as not I may inflict on you the trouble of reading a long letter, about almost nothing.

I had promised your negro George that I would take him to Little Rock & sell him to Ashley in case he would buy. This when we started was George's wish, in case he must be sold, & I even wrote Ashley that I was bringing George, to purchase whom he should have the refusal, at \$450. delivered at the Rock.

Genl. Wm. Montgomery & David Miller his son-in-law, who live at mouth of White river & own the property there, are part of a mercantile farm having 2 or 3 stores, and doing the whole commission & forwarding business from the mouth of the river, up & from both Arkansas & White rivers, and own two steam boats (The Volant & the Reindeer) which do a large portion of the freighting business up & from both these rivers to New Orleans. Montgomery took a fancy to George and asked his price. I told him the price was \$450. But that I had promised George to sell him to Ashley, and that I would not sell him to any other person before I reached Little Rock, unless George himself requested me to do so, He said he wanted George for a second steward, on board one of their steam boats, in which George would be at Little Rock & could see his brother 10 or 20 times a year. And that he would freely give the \$450. for him (I believe I could have got more if I had only asked it, but \$450. was all I asked) I told him that I positively would not sell to him unless George requested it. Though I fully believe that if George is honest & faithful, he has a better situation than even with Ashley; Montgomery & George had several interviews on the subject. And George several times (when he could find me alone) asked my advice I would not advise, but told him honestly my opinion of both, and that if he preferred Montgomery, who was very anxious to get him & could not without his own consent, he could if he wishes, lay M. under promise to treat him well, or not to sell him etc. or to allow him some small amount of privileges. Something like this I believe George done. But still hesitated about coming to me to request me to sell him to M. At. Last after a tedious delay of nearly a week, the Steamer Reindeer arrived, bound up Arkansas, owned by Montgomery & Miller & commanded by Miller (the son-in-law of Montgomery). I paid up our bill & put our baggage on Board for this place. George having inspected Millers face (whose subordinate officer he was to be) came to me just as the boat was ready to start, and asked me to sell him to Montgomery & Miller. I done so for \$450. & made a bill of sale strong as Iron works for the title.

George entered on the duties of his office & in a few minutes we were off for up the Arkansas. George will be at Little Rock this evening or tomorrow. So George is disposed of. In coming down, I proposed to Capt. Scott for George to work for his victuals & passage, which he declined (having a very full set of regular hands) That Georges passage & boarding down; his boarding while at Montgomerys & a few small articles I bought for him after I seen you, (a large coarse handkerchief to tie up his clothes in etc.) In all amount to eight dollars and a few cents (say even \$8.) That I have for George, clear of expense \$442. to pay over on the Biddle debt as directed by you. If I have a perfectly safe chance to send the money soon (with a suitable receipt for Mrs. Biddle to sign) to Dr. Dr. Simpson to pay over & take the receipt, I will do so. Otherwise I will take the money make the payment & take the receipt myself.

Ann is in fine health (and I in tolerable health) Her manner & behavior, both on the way, and when she got to her Mothers & Grand Mothers, has pleased me altogether better than I had expected. Formerly, (or at all events when I was present) she seemed to me too diffident, particularly too unwilling to read, or spell, or shew what she had, or had not learnt. Since she has got to Arkansas she seems more like to go into the other extreme. And being all the way from Linden Wood, seems to feel herself almost competent to instruct the natives here & does not hesitate to spell, read, write or play, on any suitable occasion. And some times, among children, to explain to them the meaning of what she reads! A little like as if she were a school mistress & they her schollars. She however, shews what she has improved to much more advantage than I ever seen her do at home, or at St. Louis. When you asked her to play she could not without her notes. But when we got to Genl. Montgomerys at mouth of White river, his daughter (Mrs. Miller) having a Piano and having received at least a costly (if not a good) education in Kentucky, I put Ann in charge of Mrs. Montgomery & Mrs. M iller, to live in the family until we could get a passage, (which was nearly a week) and I myself boarded in the Tavern, which was another part of the same house. But I too, was occasionally with the family. And I found then, that Ann could play (and very well too) without her notes, one tune entirely, and a principal part of two others. The family rather caressed & flattered her considerably. And often talked in her presence, that they had never seen any one who had improved as much in the same time (when I first took her from here, we had stopped at the same place to get a passage up the river, that they knew her & she them) I also took her to Judge Bates's (a short mile from this place), before I took her to her Mothers. There too, both the Judge & his wife flattered her in the (they said) more than common improvement she had made. They said they had seen the letters she had written her mother, (Mrs. B. & Anns mother, each visit the other) we staid nearly half a day at Judge Bates's. That the greatest danger of injureing Ann by her absence from you, that I can anticipate, is that she is more flattered, than any child ought to be , and it seems to me, that even now, it is makeing her too proud of hersle. On meeting her mother & Grand Mother, she was more elated & enthusiastic than I was pleased to see; and let her tongue run faster than I had ever before heard it. (Part of it however, gragging about her Aunt Mary) , but it was not very long, until she fully redeemed (in my estimation) all the enthusaism she had shewn - - When other subjects of talk was wearing out, her mother asked her (in my presence) if she would not prefer liveing here, to Missouri, or where she had been? She very promptly, ( and like an old body) answered no, that she was very glad indeed to see them, but was not willing ever to live here again. She never said or done any thing in her life, that made me feel as proud of her. To this I would have prompted her before we got here, if I had thought I dare in safety. But did not, from a fear that she might tell what I had advised her to do, or say. And answering as she did, of her own free will, and with a manner,

shewing it to be her earnest settled purpose, made it a hundred times more pleasing to me; than if she had said the same on my suggestion & request. Several years ago, some of her relatives had given her a colt, and 1 or 2 more cows (the colt now a good horse). That after some time, her mother commenced to give her an account as to her prosperity, and also the lapses in her (Anns) stock. After hearing all about it, Ann said, "Well mother, I have no use for such property, and I make a present of all of it to you." And not exactly connected with the same sentence, but pretty soon afterwards, told her mother, that she would depend on me to supply what she wanted, and what I had already given her ( her beareau, clothing etc.) And not very un-connected with the same, described my place near St. Louis, improvements, house, furniture etc. ( all in my presence) not saying that, that was hers, but that almost any one would infer, that she expected it to be hers. It would certainly take a mighty change in Ann from her present notions, to induce her to consent to stay here. But besides, I am sure, that neither her mother or other relations, would desire her to stay longer than a few weeks, Amongst the first questions asked me by her Mother, and again by her grand mother was "How long will you let Clem. (Anna) remain with us." Indicateing that the time must depend on my will. And further, it is easy to see, that they feel as proud as I do of her improvement. They have good common sense, and love the child (Ann) and know as well as any of us the propriety of her being exclusively under my protection. That I believe they would now shed tears on Anns account, if I was to say to them, here she is, and I will not take her back. And further, from Anns own account to them, and which they will beleive, of her present home (Linden Wood) They will be convinced and satisfied, that Ann is altogether better there, than any thing that could possibly be done for her here. That I am sure, they would much sooner object to my leaving her here, than they would to my takeing her back. I mention this, because when I started, you seemed to suspect, that I might have dificulty in geting Ann back. And besides all these reasons, they would have to tie Ann to keep her from going back with me.

Well, though nearly over my sheet I am not yet near through the few words I set down to write. (But if you will stand this, I promise you a shorter letter next time.) . While we were at Genl. Montgomerys (nearly a week) Ann, without knowing it herself, went through a very close examination, first as to the full extent of all she had learned, and the rules adopted as to her school, etc., and secondly, as to how she lived & fared, whether she had plenty to eat, or if she was allowed to eat as much meat as she wanted. (questions that I would never thought of asking any gody). Which they asked (as Mrs. M. told me, for Ann has not told me any thing about it) because they have had a daughter and niece, allowanced, and stinted for enough to eat, at one of the best female schools in Kentuck. Ann having satisfied them, (as Mrs. Montgomery told me) that she always had plenty , and of victuals that was good, and meat when she wanted it, without being stinted to one slice, or two, or any thing short of as much, as she wished for. Genl. Montgomery, and afterwards his wife, asked me to use my influence to get a daughter and neice of theirs, to be boarded & schooled by you, in the identical same way that Ann had been their daughter, now going in 12 & their neice in 14 or 15 years old. They are both part educated. They wish them to stay two or more years (or the youngest one 4 years) in case you are willing to keep them that long. But would send them one year sooner than not at all. They asked me, and I told them your terms as far as I knew them, and I told them too, that I did not believe you would take another schollar. That Mrs. Sibley did not teach for sake of keeping a school, nor for the sake of the money, but mainly for the sake of doing good for a few of her personal friends. That if she would agree to keep a scholl generally, she could get more scholars near home than she could take. I

then recommended the school Mrs. Sibley had told me was a good one at St. Charles. I also named the schools (which I supposed to be good) at Edwardsville, at upper Alton, and also at Lower Alton. But all was useless, they seemed as if they would almost take a fit, if they could not have their girls educated by you. The niece is a daughter of a deceased brother of Genl. M. and Mrs. M. (when the Genl. was not present) seemed as if she would be fully satisfied if you would only take her daughter (now going in 12 years old) and seemed not to care much about her niece (now 14 or upwards years old) going to the same school. Though I seen their little daughter every day we were there I know nothing of her temperature or disposition. The niece I have not seen since she was 4 or 5 years old. I think it as like as otherwise (but do not know) that they have been considerably indulged. Genl. Montgomery is rich, that as far as money is concerned, he would as soon pay in advance, as any other way, and would furnish his daughter & niece all their necessary furnishings in the best manner. I think Mrs. Montgomery, quite a fine & good woman. The Genl. is in truth & reality a militia General of Arkansas Militia. He is a very kind & friendly man, and is popular, has but a very common education and though largely engaged in commission & mercantile business, is also bordering close on what I would call a Gambler. Though, to hear him one would think he abhorred Gamblers. Yet he plays for money, and wins all he can (he would say only for amusement with Gentlemen). But when one plays on almost all occasions, nearly all sorts of games, to win money, I can draw no plain line between him & a Gambler.

I am thus particular, because they importuned me more & more every day while we stayed, to write & try to get you to take & educate their girls. I at last promised to write, and in doing so, feel bound to tell you all I know, that you may be in no way deceived, as far as I have knowledge. I wish You (Mrs. Sibley) to please write me a letter, exclusively on this subject, directed to me at this place and at same time please write ma nother letter on any other subnects you may choose, and if you choose, enclose the one in the other. The letter in reference ot educateing Genl. M. two girls, please write in such manner, that I may shew it to him or his wife. And if you consent to take the two girls, or either of them, then I would like the letter to contain your exact terms, and list of the articles of bedding, or others (if any) that they must bring with them. I start up to Little Rock in a few days and may be two or more weeks there & above, but after you get this, no letter from you can reach me at any other point than here. That I wish you to please write me immediately I doubt whether I will attempt to start home before the middle, or 20th Febuary.

Col. Eli. J. Lewis, who when I was last here, was so desirous that I should then take two of his daughters, to be educated at the same school with Ann, is now in New Orleans, that I have not seen, and cannot see him until I return from up the country. His three oldest daughters are sisters children of Anns mother ( I say his 3 oldest, because he has had 2 or 3 daughters by his last wife, who was a Miss Phillips). The youngest of these 3 oldest daughters, Anns mother has raised since she was 2 or 3 weeks old. I learn that Col. Lewis now desires, that I should take this youngest of his 3 oldest children, and put her if possible at the same school with Ann. In this case, too, I have stated the probability, that you would not take any new schollar, and that there is a good School at St. Charles etc. ( The same as I stated to Montgomery). That until Lewis returns, I cannot tell whether he will send his daughter to the School at St. Charles or not. (His wish being that she should go to the same school with Ann). Should you have changed your mind from the veiws you had, when I last conversed with you on the subject of your school, and concluded to take any scholars in addition to those you then had, Col. Lewis would be

very glad indeed, to get a place there for his little Mary, (17 or 18 months younger than Ann) In your letter to me (not the one that I wish to shew Genl. & Mrs. Montgomery) please express your will, whether you are, or are not willing to take Mary Lewis as one.

I wrote you hastily from mouth of Ohio, a letter to find its way to you as it could (being no post office there) and will probably write you again from Pulaski, or Conway counties. Ann said she would write to you this week, but the mail leaving here but once a week (Tuesday morning, which is morrow) and not very regular at that, this will (or should) reach you a week before her letter can, if even she writes it tomorrow.

Wishing you good health, and happiness, and hoping to receive letters from you on my return to this place,

I remain your ever respectful firend.

Wm. Russell.

Major George C. & Mrs. Mary E. Sibley

P.S. I do not wish Ann, (or any one that would tell her) to know that I have told so much about her.

W.R.

Wm. Russell

24 Dec. 1832.

from Port of Arkansas

recd. 9th & Ans. the 10<sup>th</sup>

Jany. 1833.

[Occasionally in the typescript from which I am transcribing this document, a letter – usually the last letter of a word – is faded. Sometimes this letter is part of the correct spelling of the word, and occasionally it would, if read, create a misspelled word. I am unsure of the significance of faded-out letters – whether they represent additions, errors, removed letters, or simply places where the text did not print well. Since I am unsure how to represent these letters systematically, the ones that are necessary to the spelling of a word are included, and the ones that would be errors are not included unless it is obvious that they are meant to be included.]

[There are numerous spelling errors in this manuscript. These are all transcribed exactly from the typescript that I am copying. Many appear to be typos, but if they are typos they were made by the typist who made the typed manuscript.]