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Letter from George Sibley to Dr. Archibald Dorsey, August 29, 1827

George Champlin Sibley

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Dr. Arch^d Dorsey
Bush Town
Hartford County
Maryland

George C. Sibley

Fountain Cottage, near Ft. Osage,
Missouri
August 29th, 1827

To Dr. Arch^d. Dorsey
Bush Town
Hartford County
Maryland

Sir,

Your letter dated 14th February last addressed to "Dr. John Sibley" came into my hands last Spring, just as I was on the eve of Setting out from home upon a tour in the great Western Prairies on Public Service- perceiving that your letter was obviously intended for me tho' addressed to my Father, who resides at Natchitoches in Louisiana; I should have answered your enquiries immediately on its Rec^t. if I had not been much hurried at the time, and being unwilling to answer you under Such circumstances, lest I might not answer as correctly as your enquiry appears to expect and require-

Hoping it may not now be too late, I embrace the first leisure hour I have been able to command Since my Return home, to give you Such information as I can, by way of Reply to your Several queries in Relation to this part of the country-

"First Rate wild Lands" may probably be purchased here in this county next year from the U. States, at from \$1.25 to \$3 per acre- The County of Jackson it is proper to inform you, has been designated and organized only within the present year; All the Lands within it, except a thousand Acres that I possess under a floating claim, belong yet to the Government, and the far greater part of it was purchased from the Indians So late as the Summer of 1825- previously to which time, there

were no White Settlements within the present limits of the county except a few families near the old Ft. Osage- Now, Jackson County contains about two Hundred Voters.- The Public Lands have recently been all Surveyed, and it is Supposed will be offered for Sale in the usual way, sometime in the year 1828- The greater part of this land, even that upon which some improvements have been made by actual Settlers, will most probably be bid off at the Minimum Gov^t. Price (\$1.25 an Acre) Some few Spots that possess great local advantages, may sell for higher Prices, but I do not believe any will go above \$3, or at most \$5 an Acre - And these are the rates at which some of the best Lands upon which the Sun ever Shone, may be purchased, whenever the Government Shall think proper to order it Sold- "Cabins & comfortable out Houses"- Such as are usually built of Logs, cost but little to erect them, or if purchased Second handed.-

The average Crops per acre may be Rated thus- Wheat & Rye 25 to 30 Indⁿ. Corn 35 to 55 Bushels; and where the fields are nicely prepared and "well cultivated" fully a fourth more may be produced- Corn and Rye are always good and Sure- Wheat crops have not hitherto turned out very well, tho' the probability is they will improve when our fields have been longer cultivated and better prepared-

The prices of Grain vary from year to year, but are commonly very low- at the present time, I can buy Wheat and Rye for half a Dollar a Bushel, and old Corn for Seventy five cents a Barrel- When the corn Crops now growing (which are unusually promising) come in, the price of that article will doubtless be reduced to 37½ or at most 50 cents a Barrel, and merely nominal at that, for there will be little or no demand either for corn or Small Grain- everybody has enough to spare- Emigrants may expect to obtain their necessary Supplies of grain and Meat extremely cheap.-

There has never been any Tobacco grown yet in the county- but I have been informed by persons who are skilful and experienced in that culture, that our rich uplands are without doubt well adapted for it- of this, I entertain no doubt myself, and am very confident that we shall grow Tobacco in this County, that will compete with any Missouri Tobacco, in any Market- and it is now well Settled, that the Tobacco from this State is uncommonly fine.-

Our Rich bottoms will produce Hemp to great advantage, and are every way adapted to the growth of that valuable Staple- Tobacco and Hemp will no doubt be our Staple commodities-

As Respects the healthiness of the country, I shall only Remark, that I have long since come to the conclusion for myself, that it is quite as healthy here and hereabout, and throughout this county, as most newly Settled fertile countries usually are- There is much to produce ague & fever, and bilious fever, in the wild state of the country, and much more I think, in the careless and filthy manner in which many of the People live- The prevailing diseases are Bilious fevers & Ague & fever- Dysentery is by no means common- Nor are any of the prevalent diseases very fatal- I have never understood that it is less Sickly in the high Prairies than elsewhere- except in the large flat bottoms, where indeed very few people Settle themselves- It is not esteemed unhealthy immediately on the banks of the Missouri.- In fine, I have warrant for the opinion, that this Section of Country is not now Sickly; and that it will be healthy; when better Settled and cultivated- There are no "vast Swamps or Marshes" in the country; nor are venomous Snakes very numerous; in the Prairies there are very few Snakes of any kind.- As far as our experiments have hitherto gone, Apples, Pears, Peaches and cherries Succeed very well, I am of opinion

that Apples and Grapes will do extremely well here- Red Currants, Apricots & Nectarines, do not Succeed well So far- Our uplands appear to be "kindly to horticulture" in a very high degree- Melons, Canteleupes and Cucumbers are produced of the finest kinds I ever Saw anywhere, when suitable pains are taken. I have now lying by me a Slice of a green flesh Canteleupe, that would be termed delicious any where- Sweet and Irish Potatoes grow extremely well, and are very productive, as do turnips.- Poultry of all kinds are easily raised in great abundance. Chickens are not subject to the Gapes. Salt, Lime and Sand are plenty- The price of Salt is from Seventy five Cents to one Dollar and a quarter per bushel of Fifty pounds- Lime Stone is plenty and only costs the burning- Cotton can be raised of very good quality for domestic purposes; but is too precarious a Crop to plant more largely.-

Groceries are conveniently had- My last Supply from St. Louis (whence I obtain it annually) cost here at home; Coffee 23 c^{ts}.- Lump Sugar 23 c^{ts}.- Brown Sugar 12 c^{ts}.- Imperial Tea 180 c^{ts} a pound. when purchased from the Country Stores in Small parcels as needed; these Articles cost a little higher of course- They are always low at St. Louis, and can be transported at an expense of about 2 cents a pound to this part of the country- Nails and Such Articles are usually low at St. Louis, say 6^d.- 10^d. & 20^d Cut at 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ cts a pound- or Say 12 cts here.

Labour is just beginning to get down in price, but is still high enough, considering all things- the usual price for common labourers by the month, White or Black, is \$13 a Month, or 50 cents a day- The best Slaves hire for about \$120 a year- common ones for about \$80- Slaves who are Mechanics, as Carpenters, Smiths, ----? hire for about

\$20 a Month- but are not much in demand- At present Slaves are high in price- first rate Men are worth from 400 to 500 Dollars- Lads 3 to 400 - Women and Girls from 2-300. Dollars- We have not any great variety of fish- The Missouri river yields Catfish, Eels, and Buffalo fish; of the first I have weighed Several that exceeded 100 lbs before they were cleaned- The Smaller ones, of 8 or 10 lbs are very good- The Buffalo fish are about as large as Shad, which they resemble in appearance, tho' they are indifferent fish-

Some of the Small Streams, contain Perch, Whitefish, Pickerel, and Bass- but we do not find either profit or amusement in catching either- Our falls and Winters are usually dry and favourable- The Latitude here is 39°. 12', and the climate as respects cold in Winter, much the Same as the Dist. of Columbia; except that we have less Rain and Snow- Altho' we have Some very cold days, and Some violent Snow Storms occasionally, Still I do not think our Winters are Severe- We are most abundantly favoured in the fall Season, with clear dry weather, by which we are enabled to Save our Corn & forage in the best manner.

Being no Physician (and having for the last twelve years, little or no use for one in my family) I am unable to Say what are the regular charges in this part of the country-

You are correct in Supposing, that a Physician would not find it very profitable to settle hereabouts, relying chiefly on his profession. I have no doubt tho', that a Steady and respectable Physician; having other pursuits, would in proper time find it worth his attention to practise in Some of our growing Settlements.

Springs are plenty and good; and no doubt good wells may easily be had- In all sorts of trade in this country; Cash is a very

commanding commodity- It has a preference over any other of, I think, one fourth; or perhaps a third- Our People are generally poor, and want Money to purchase Land.-

Horses, Asses, Cattle, Hogs and Sheep are easily raised, and are raised in great numbers; except Asses and Sheep; which are only just beginning to be introduced, and Seem to promise well- And I have no doubt the Soil and Climate would Suit the Poppy. The Soil is certainly Rich enough to produce anything &, when Sufficiently ameliorated by manure and tillage, would no doubt yield abundance of Opium.-

I believe Sir, I have now given answers to all your questions; if they lack order in their arrangements, it is because they have been answered in the order you put them.-

I will add; that I have Resided chiefly in this neighbourhood, for upwards of 14 years; that I have only been once Sick during that time & then only for a Short time- I have Seen nearly all the U. States, and have been in other countries; and upon the whole, I think I prefer this- My pursuit is Stock raising- Horses, Asses, & Cattle and Mules- and I am preparing to plant Large Orchards, & to Sow Large Meadows- which I may possibly live to see in perfection; tho' I doubt it.- The Cheapness of Land and its excellence in this country, is unquestionably a Strong inducement for People to Settle in it from the old States, especially Such as have large families & are not wealthy- With you, a man worth \$10,000 clear, is only counted in moderate circumstances- here, he would be looked upon as one very wealthy- There Such

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