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George Champlin Sibley Papers

George and Mary Easton Sibley Papers

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Obituary for George Sibley, January 31, 1863

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OBITUARY.

On the 31st of January, 1853, at Elma, his country seat, in St. Charles county, Missouri, Maj. GEORGE CHAMPLIN SIBLEY, departed this life, aged nearly eighty-one. He retained his mental powers to the last; always cheerful, hopeful, and resigned to the will of his Heavenly Father, his last years were emphatically years of peace. On the night previous to his death he retired to his bed (apparently) likely to live many more years in his earthly tabernacle, but between the hours of six and seven o'clock in the morning, from the land of pleasant dreams and peaceful slumbers, without a movement, a struggle, or a groan, his immortal spirit passed into the realities of a glorious eternity. The following short extract from his journal will show from whence he derived that enviable serenity of temper and peace of mind which he so eminently possessed and displayed. Writing on his 50th birthday, he says:

"I am certainly becoming more and more infirm of body, from the effects of advancing age. However this may be, sure I am that God hath dealt with me, thro' the past year, as well as thro' all my past life, in great mercy and kindness: spiritually, I do hope, more than ever before—temporally, without any diminution of former allowances of comfort and abundance. Altogether, I may truly say, and I do say, 'my cup runneth over.' O, Lord, give me grace to respond with becoming gratitude to Thee for all Thy favors so largely conferred on Thy unworthy servant, my family and household, and constrain me to live out my earthly pilgrimage consistently with my obligations of love and duty to Thee, and consistently with what I well know to be for my true happiness, here and forever. I humbly ask this, my Father, for my Redeemer's sake."

Major Sibley was born in Great Barrington, Berkshire county, Massachusetts, on the last day of April, 1782. His father was the late Dr. John Sibley, of Natchitoches, Louisiana, who emigrated at the close of the Revolutionary War, in which he served his country as surgeon in the army, to Fayetteville, North Carolina, and from thence removed to Natchitoches, on Red river, where he died in his eightieth year. His mother was the daughter of the celebrated divine, Dr. Samuel Hopkins, of Newport, Rhode Island. The years of his childhood and youth were spent in North Carolina, from whence, while yet quite a youth, he was appointed by Mr. Jefferson to an office in the Indian Department, and sent to St. Louis soon after the purchase of Louisiana, and arrived there after Gen. Wilkinson had taken formal possession of the country as U. S. Military Governor. Not long after this he was sent into the Indian country as Indian Agent and Factor. It was at this period that he went out with a hundred Osage warriors, and visited the Grand Saline and Salt Mountain, and explored a region of country which he supposed had never before been seen by the white man. A report of the wonders of nature he there saw has been already published. His many letters written during his Agency to the Government attest his interest in the welfare of the red men of the West, as well as his untiring devotion to the duties of his station. Those duties he performed with honor to himself and satisfaction to his Government. As late as the year 1841 he wrote a long letter to Henry Clay on Indian affairs, which, if the advice therein contained had been heeded, the late dreadful scenes in Minnesota would never have taken place.

Soon after he retired from the Indian Department he was appointed one of the three Commissioners to survey and mark out a road from Missouri to New Mexico. He was the only one of the three who went to Santa Fe, where, and at Taos, he remained a year with the Surveyor and party before permission could be obtained from the Mexican Government to survey and mark the road through its territory. This duty, which involved some treaties with the Indians, was performed with his usual zeal and fidelity. He was a great friend of African colonization and of the enslaved Africans of our land.

Although Major Sibley was a friend to gradual emancipation, allowing time to prepare the negro for freedom and colonization, he was decidedly opposed to modern abolitionism, which is proved by the following extract from the emancipation paper executed and given to the last slave he ever owned: "Baltimore was born in Kentucky; he is honest and well disposed, and capable of supporting himself respectably and usefully, and I trust will continue to do so. If I were not well convinced of this he should not 'go out free' with my consent, firmly believing as I do and ever have that, with few exceptions, the best position for the negro race in these States for their own good is that of domestic slavery and strict subordination to the white race." This was written in 1839. The day before he died, the last effort of his pen, an article on slavery, was written and forwarded to the Philadelphia Presbyterian, in his own handwriting, as fair, beautiful, and steady as he would have written at the age of twenty-five.

He was the friend, the promotor and advocate of the Bible cause, having been for many years, and continued to be until his death, President of the St. Charles County Bible Society of Missouri. Major Sibley was also a zealous advocate of Christian education, as is proved by the standing monument, "Lindenwood College," erected (by subscription) on a tract of land which he had owned for nearly fifty years, and on which he lived over thirty years—the most beautiful, the best improved, the most valuable part of which, amounting to one hundred and twenty acres, with the hearty consent of his wife, (and, it may truly be said, by her suggestion,) he gave to the "College."

He was decidedly, without any wavering, a friend of the "Union," as the spirited and eloquent resolutions, drawn up and offered by him, and passed unanimously, at a meeting held in the city of St. Charles, Missouri, attest; among which was the following:

Resolved, That we do not believe there exists any just or reasonable, or even plausible pretext for the dissolution of the Union; that there is no evil, no grievance, no just cause of complaint, arising from the existence of negro slavery, or from any other question of sectional right or jealousy, that may not and ought not to be amicably settled in an honest spirit of forbearance and compromise, all parties acting, as they should, in the fear of God; and that no sectional difficulty can arise that cannot be much more easily and perfectly healed and lawfully settled in the Union than out of it.

Major Sibley was married in 1815 to Mary, eldest daughter of Col. Rufus Easton, at that time a delegate to Congress from the Territory of Missouri, and who emigrated from New York to St. Louis in the year 1806. He never had any children. His wife survives him.