George C. Sibley’s Plea for the
"Garden of Missouri" in 1824

In the early history of the region called Missouri the name of George Champlin Sibley (1782-1863) needs little introduction. Son of Dr. John Sibley (1757-1837), a prominent physician and journalist who moved from North Carolina to the Louisiana frontier, to divide his attention between local politics, cotton planting, and service as the United States Indian Agent for Orleans Territory at Natchitoches in the years 1805-1814, the younger Sibley made every effort to measure up to the distinguished career of his father. In 1805, probably through family influence and political connections in St. Louis, he secured by appointment from President Jefferson the position of assistant factor at Fort Bellefontaine. Apparently his experience there placed him in good stead with the Superintendent of Indian Trade, as well as other ranking officials in the War Department, for in 1806, when the government opened a new trading post at Fort Osage (formerly Fort Clark), George Sibley was selected as chief factor at that important but remote outpost. Excluding a short period during the War of 1812, when the post was temporarily evacuated, Sibley remained in charge of Fort Osage until it was closed in 1822, the year the federal factory system throughout the Southern and Western frontiers was officially abandoned.

By this time Missouri had become a state. Following the submission of a number of petitions and memorials, some dating back to 1817, the western boundary had been established as it presently remains—excluding, of course, the Platte Purchase of 1837, which added the area north and east of the Missouri River, above the mouth of the Kansas river, and south of the future state of Iowa. From this vantage point at Fort Osage Sibley was in an excellent position to gauge the economic potential in and around the great bend of the Missouri, especially the future site of Kansas City. He was no less able to appreciate the difficulty of maintaining order between the private traders, the government, the various tribes with

forces undermining the government's factory system, and contributing to the closing of Fort Osage, logically coincided with the remarkable increase of white population in the celebrated Boonslick country.

In 1820, for example, just one year before private traders such as Francois Chouteau had established themselves near the mouth of the Kansas river, Howard county, at the "cutting edge" of Missouri's agrarian frontier, had a population of 12,000. The local land office at Franklin opened in early 1819, and within a short time Boonslick land was selling at the average of four dollars an acre, as opposed to $2.34 at the St. Louis land office. By 1821, with a population of 13,427, Howard was by far the most populous of Missouri's fifteen counties. Clearly it was only a matter of time before farmers, speculators, and townbuilders would occupy the area west of Franklin.

From the subjective perspective of the white invader it was particularly unfortunate that the Osage line of 1808 did not coincide with Missouri's western boundary. What was needed, of course, to open present Jackson county (and the tier of counties to the south) to legal white settlement, were additional land cession arrangements with the Osages and Kansas. It was at this important juncture in the history of Missouri that George Champlin Sibley played a significant role.

Unlike the Osages, who had undergone the experience of negotiating a formal cession with the federal government, the Kansa had committed themselves to no such compromise. Talks arranged in 1806 by Captain Amos Stoddard and Lieutenant Zebulon Pike, in Washington and at the Republican Pawnee village respectively, were "peace and friendship" parleys, not formal cession treaties. That the Kansa had occupancy rights

3. W. J. McGee, "The Osages," Fifteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute (Washington, 1897), 159-164. For the Kansa claim to this land see Document B, below.
4. Kappler, Indian Affairs, 257-269, 305-310. For a fairly precise geographical illustration of these cessions, see Charles C. Royce (comp.), "Indian Land Cessions in the United States," Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, 1896-1897), Pl. CXLIV, titled "Missouri I." A notable error by Royce was his omission of the Kansa claim south of the Missouri river, as described in Document B, below.
5. For discussions of the failure of the factory system, and especially the role of the private fur companies, see Katherine Coman, "Government Factories; an Attempt to Control Competition in the Fur Trade," Bulletin of the American Economic Association, 4th Series, No. 2 (April, 1911), 374-384; Royal B. Way, "The United States Factory System for Trading with the Indians, 1796-1822," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, VI, No. 2 (September, 1919), 234; and Franklin G. Adams, "Reminiscences of Frederick Chouteau," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, VIII (1903-1904), 433.
to the area west of Fort Osage and south of the Missouri was well known, at least to Sibley, many fur traders, and the War Department leadership. And that these people could be troublesome to potential white settlers was equally apparent. In October, 1808, for example, Sibley was “induced to shut the store [at Fort Osage] against them on account of their insolent and violent conduct.” A year later an employee of the Missouri Fur Company reported that these people had “long been the terror of the neighboring Indians [and] their temerity is hardly credible. ... These people,” he concluded, “cannot be at peace with the white or red people [for] they rob, murder, and destroy when opportunity offers.”

Obviously these were oversimplified appraisals, and to his credit Sibley decided to personally visit the principal Kansa village, then located on the north bank of the Kansas river, about 115 miles west of Fort Osage (near present Manhattan, Kansas). In company with two interpreters, eleven Osage scouts, and the prominent Osage war chief, Sans Oreille, Sibley made the expedition in the late spring of 1811. It was a highly successful venture. In fact Sibley was so favorably impressed with the tribe’s peaceful intentions and their general disposition that upon his return he wrote Superintendent William Clark in St. Louis, “I assure you that I have great hopes of the Kansa becoming one of the best tribes in your agency.” However, Sibley’s optimism apparently was based on the assumption that the Kansa would be able to hunt, trap, plant, and continue their traditional way of life well apart from the white settlements. Indeed, their repeated encounters with the Republican Pawnees, their chronic difficulties with the white traders, and their sullen behavior when they visited Fort Osage, indicated that they would not soon welcome the yeoman in their midst.

Thus by the time petitions requesting Missouri statehood began to arrive in Washington, it was clear to Superintendent Clark that the time to explore the possibility of extinguishing the Kansa claim to all or parts of present Jackson, Lafayette, Cass, and Johnson counties had arrived. Sibley, with his wide experience and apparent influence with the Kansa, was naturally selected to “enter into a provisional arrangement with the Chiefs and principal persons of the Kanzas Nation, for the purchase of a portion of the Territory they claimed on the waters of the Missouri.” This he accomplished with surprisingly little difficulty. By November 5, 1818, he had completed the preliminary negotiations, which, had they been ratified, would have ceded all Kansa claims in the future state of Missouri. But the anticipated treaty was not ratified, probably because frontier sentiment was then mounting in favor of an even larger cession. In addition, the Panic of 1819 and the political turmoil accompanying the statehood movement militated against any immediate settlement. Nevertheless, Sibley had clearly demonstrated his capability as a competent Indian negotiator, as well as an imaginative and knowledgeable spokesman for the domain he referred to in 1824 as “The Garden of Missouri.” Perhaps it is not too much to observe that this champion of westward expansion understood, in terms of climate, soil, and strategic location, that a major population center at the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas rivers was virtually inevitable.

Sibley’s letter to Senator David Barton, reproduced below as Document A, is, perhaps, less significant for its call for renewed negotiations with the Kansa than it is a shrewd plea for an area of Missouri with immense economic potential. Equally significant, it contains the basic ingredients of an expansionist ideology that within a few years would be called “Manifest Destiny,” and it utilizes what turned out to be an exceedingly effective tactic in many future white invasions of Indian Territory—the argument that unless legal land titles were bestowed on those squatters already in possession of Indian land, they inevitably would slide down the scale of “civilization” and become no less “primitive” than the “savages” they were trying to expel. Document B, the Preliminary Kansa Treaty of 1818, is reproduced because it identifies with considerable precision the land boundaries in Missouri the Kansa were expected to cede. Finally, Document C is Article One of the Kansa Treaty of 1825, the legal instru-

15. Ibid. Referring to the anticipated cession, Sibley wrote Clark, “I am certain that I can point out a tract of 20 miles square, in the Territory offered for sale ..., which will in two years ... be equal to ten years of the annual payment to the Kansa ..., Sibley to Clark, November 5, 1818, Indian Papers, Missouri Historical Society.
16. For several approaches to the general problem of alleged cultural deterioration among white people residing in close proximity to the “savages” and/or in the “wilderness,” see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1727-1862 (Lexington, 1956); Albert K. Weinberg, Manifest Destiny, A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History (Baltimore, 1935); Bernard A. Weisberger, They Gathered at the River (Chicago, 1966); Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Lands: The American West as Symbol and Myth (New York, 1959); and especially Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind (New Haven, 1967).
ment that ultimately accomplished the long-sought expulsion of the tribe from the "Garden of Missouri."

Following accepted scholarly practice, the original spelling, word order and deletions in Documents A and B have been preserved. For the sake of lucidity, however, Sibley's random capitalization has been discarded.

Document A

Fort Osage January 10th, 1824

D. Sir:

I do not believe you could render a more acceptable service to this section of our state than by moving an appropriation of money for the extinguishment of the Indian title to the land claimed by the Kansas on the south side of the Missouri within the bounds of the state. It is with good reason I assure you that the above land has obtained from those who have explored it, the appellation of "The Garden of Missouri."

Besides the uncommon excellence of the soils and beautiful aspects of the country, it possesses other great natural advantages that would render it a garden indeed if once settled and owned by our enterprising citizens. This fine tract of country now lies an unproductive wilderness, utterly useless to the savages who claim it; and interdicted to our people, thousands of whom are now anxiously waiting for our govt. to purchase it, that they may enter upon it, and reap from it those great advantages which it is presumable the God of Nature designed for the use of civilized man.

Were this section purchased by govt. and immediately placed in market, the rapidity of its settlement and improvement would undoubtedly surpass that of any other part of the state or union. Its rich and exuberant soils would quickly yield a copious overflow of valuable commodities to enrich the state. Its water falls which are numerous and sources of streams of very great value, would soon give life to manufacturing establishments; and our state would be strengthened by the speedy accession of another community of hardy farmers. The Kansas are willing to sell their claims to the U. States, for a mere trifle as compared with the immense value of the land, and I am very sure there can be no good reason urged why the govt. should refuse to purchase it.

It is vain to attempt to restrain our people from occupying any part of the state which they desire, such restriction only tends to make a vast number of the unproductive citizens, who tenaciously refuse to purchase lands or settle themselves anywhere, 'till the favorite spot is within their reach.

17. Sibley Papers.

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It tends to multiply to a great extent squatters upon the public land and the consequent injury thereof by destruction of timber &c.

I believe there are more than an hundred instances within my own knowledge of men with families, who are now squatters on the public land, who are able to purchase, but who will not 'till they can purchase the tract I am speaking of.

Meanwhile they are utterly useless to themselves or the state, living chiefly upon the bounties of wild nature, the venison and honey and wild fruits of the land. They necessarily contract habits of violence and a sort of semi-savage barbarism of manners that in some degree unites them for the duties of civilised life. They are in short homeless wanderers—and such is the stubbornness of their nature that they will rather remain as they are than to forego the great privilege of occupying the home of their own free choice. For my own part I could never approve that policy which seems to have been too often adopted by the general government of refusing access to any very desirable section of the public domain 'till some other sections less desirable by far are sold and settled. This sort of emigrants "Bible and Cheese" policy will never be submitted to by the people of the West. As I have said before, they will not settle at all if they cannot obtain the land they most [?] settle in that section of country which they choose live in.

The favour (if fav. it can be called) which we ask of the government amounts is simply to this, "Purchase this valuable part of country from the Kansas to whom it is useless, for a trifling sum, and sell it to your own citizens who desire it and will make a valuable use of it, for an immense profit." This favour may well be asked by Missouri as an act of justice; very indeed it would appear somewhat strange if it should be refused after a proper examination of the subject; the more especially as the like requests from other states have never I believe been refused. Be this as it may, it is very certain that the settlement of the tract in question will very materially benefit this state, whose policy it ought most undoubtedly now to be during these "Piping times of Peace," to encourage and foster the settlement of our extreme frontiers; and to draw into action all the resources within our limits. To suppose this fine section of country to remain much longer a wilderness, while so many hundreds of our people are desirous of settling and improving it would in my opinion deserve severe reprehension. For my self, I assure you sir I have no other interest in this matter than as one settled in the country and who feels a desire to see something like civilised society growing up around him. I have no speculations in view nor do I
expect to have any growing out of the proposed purchase from the Kansas. I am principally induced to address these very hasty remarks to you in consequence of the very numerous applications that have recently been made of me on this subject by persons who wish to settle above here to I have mentioned know if the government intends soon to make this purchase and how soon it will be possible to affect the transfer and obtain permission to settle there and being persuaded that you will very willingly exert yourself to effect any reasonable and practicable object desired by so many of your fellow citizens in this part of the state, I have freely consented to make this communication in their behalf.

In order to throw some light on the subject and to give you some idea of the probable cost of the land above mentioned, I enclose you a copy of a report\(^{19}\) which I made to Gov. Clark in relation to this proposed purchase in the year 1818, when I was serving in the Indian Department. - A -

You would much oblige me and gratify a host of anxious enquirers if you would write me once or twice to say what progress this subject is likely to make during the present session of congress.

I am with great respect yr. friend & mo. obt. sv.
[signed]
G. C. Sibley

Hon. David Barton
Senator from Missouri
Washington City

Document B\(^{20}\)

Memorandum of a preliminary arrangement (for the purchase and sale of lands) made on the 20th day of September 1818 at Fort Osage between G. C. Sibley of [?] of Ind affairs for the U. States acting in this matter under instructions from His Excy Governor Clark on the one part and the chiefs and head men of the Kansas nation on the other part.

Deposition by G. C. Sibley—The Governor has directed me to inquire of the chiefs and head men of the Kansas nation, whether they are willing to sell a portion of their lands to the United States, and if they are, to know of them the extent of the tract they will sell, and the terms.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.  

\(^{20}\) Sibley Papers.

The said chiefs and warriors having had the above proposition under their consideration for two days, and having consulted with nearly all the principal persons of their nation, who are here present, and have themselves heard the propositions—now come forward freely without the least persuasion or compulsion, in the presence of nearly the whole of the nation and of many respectable white persons and say that they are willing to establish the following lines as the bounds of the territory which they will sell, to wit—Beginning at the mouth of the Nodoway river\(^{21}\) on the Missouri, and from thence running in a direct course to the mouth of the river La Plane,\(^{22}\) a branch of the Kansas river, thence due south to the Neosho river,\(^{23}\) thence direct to the mouth southwardly head branch of the Tabo river, thence down said Tabo to the Missouri,\(^{24}\) thence with the Missouri up to the beginning—all the right, title and claims which they the said Kansas nation have to the territory embraced within the bounds above described (and also all the land they own or claim north east of the Missouri river)\(^{25}\) they will sell and transfer to the United States forever, on the following terms and conditions to wit—At the signing and sealing of the treaty of transfer of the above territory, the United States shall pay to the Kansas nation one thousand dollars in suitable merchandise at fair prices. And annually in the month of September ever after, at such place as shall be agreed on, the United States shall pay to the said nation the following articles or an equivalent in cash or other merchandise at the option of said Kansas: to say, one hundred 3 pr blankets—one hundred and fifty 2½ pr blankets—one hundred and fifty one pr blankets—one hundred and fifty yards of strouding aparted—twenty yards of scarlet cloth—200 yards of calico aparted—twenty pounds of vermilion—forty fusiles—three hundred pounds of gunpowder—six hundred pounds of lead—one hundred dollar value in wampum and trinkets—one hundred and fifty dollar value in kettles, hoops, axes, knives, flints, awls, and tobacco. All the

\(^{21}\) The Nodoway river, about ten miles above present St. Joseph, Missouri.

\(^{22}\) The Delaware (formerly Grasshopper) river, near present Perry, Kansas, in Jefferson county.

\(^{23}\) The Neosho river, near present Iola, Kansas, in Allen county.

\(^{24}\) The mouth of Tabo creek is about eight miles east of present Lexington, Missouri, in Lafayette county.

\(^{25}\) Sibley's reference to "north and east of the Missouri river" apparently was based on the notes of Auguste Chouteau, made in 1816. This area included land north of the Missouri and west of the east boundary of the Platte Purchase (1837). Chouteau, in 1816, did not recognize the Kansas claim south of the Missouri. See Map Exhibiting the Territorial lines of Several Nations and Tribes of Indians agreeable to the notes of A. Chouteau, reduced, and laid down on a scale of 80 miles to the inch, by R. Paul, February, 1816, Map No. 884, Tube 792, Cartographic Division, National Archives.
said merchandise to be of good quality. All the said chiefs and head men
in behalf of their nation give notice that they shall further stipulate in
the treaty of transfer a convention for the particular protection of the U.
States, and for their aid and counsel in effecting an amelioration of their
personal condition, a blacksmith to mend and repair plows, hoes, axes &c
will be particularly stipulated for. In testimony of the above, the said
chiefs and warriors have offered their marks to this memorandum having
a full and clear understanding thereof.—

In the presence of [signed]
Wm Clark p. s.
U. S. Army
A. I. Brune [?]
J. L. Gray
Paul Loise, Osage Interpreter

Shonje, negaice-head chief X mk.
Ca,he,ga,wa,toiue,ga—son of h. chf X mk.
Waw,hua,che,ro—[?] chf X mk.
Big Neck, warrior X mk.
Big Soldier, warrior X mk.
Petit Meajre, warrior X mk.
Waw,hua,? do X mk.
Tocrogoh,he do X mk.
Cochio,nrouee do X mk.
Mo,sho,sha do X mk.
Washon,ge do X mk.

Document C

Articles of a treaty made and concluded at the City of Saint Louis, in
the State of Missouri [on June 3, 1825], between William Clark, Superin-
tendent of Indian Affairs, Commissioner on the part of the United States
of America, and the undersigned Chiefs, Head Men, Warriors of the
Kansas Nation of Indians, duly authorized and empowered by said Na-

Article 1.
The Kansas do hereby cede to the United States all lands lying within
the State of Missouri, to which the said nation have title or claim; and do
further cede and relinquish, to the said United States, all other land
which they now occupy, or to which they have title or claim, lying West

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of the said State of Missouri, and within the following boundaries: begin-
ing at the entrance of the Kansas river into the Missouri river; from
thence North to the North-West corner of the State of Missouri; from
thence Westwardly to the Nodewa river, thirty miles from its entrance into
the Missouri; from thence to the entrance of the big Nemahaw river into
the Missouri, and with that river to its source; from thence to the source
of the Kansas river, leaving the old village of the Pania Republic to the
West; from thence, on the ridge dividing the waters of the Kansas river
from those of the Arkansas, to the Western boundary of the State line of
Missouri, and with that line, thirty miles, to the place of beginning.27

27. For the cession boundaries in the future state of Kansas, see Royce, "Indian
Land Cessions," Pl. CXXXIII, titled "Kansas I."

Mother Hubbards

The elderly Kansas City police chief, Mr. Speers, is rais-
ing Cain about Mother Hubbards being worn on the streets
and says he is resolved to preserve the morality of the city.
He has issued an order that the garments should be kept off
the streets. The social clubs of Kansas City are indignant and
demand an explanation of Mr. Speers which he should pro-
hibit the wearing of Hubbards and not attach the abominable
pull-back skirt. It is said that Chief Speers will defend his
position by explaining how the Mother Hubbard is so much
worn by ladies who lay no claim to social position, and were
never admitted further north than Fourth St. This bids fair
to be one of the hottest seasons on record, and it would not
be worth the trouble it would take to drive the wearing of
the comfortable garment into obscurity, the chief might save
himself many a warm day's work and lengthen the days of
his life by not making a fight on the ever popular Hub-
bard. Capt. Speers, you are too old a man to undertake such
work. You are highly esteemed by the people of Kansas
City, both as a citizen and officer, and all would regret to
see you sacrifice yourself upon such an issue. The Mother
Hubbard will be worn as long as the summers continue hot.

Howard County Advertiser, June 17, 1886