LETTERS AND DOCUMENTS

DR. JOHN SIBLEY AND THE LOUISIANA-TEXAS FRONTIER, 1803-1814

JULIA KATHRYN GARRETT

(Continued)

LETTER 15

Natchitoches Jany 30th 1810

Sir

Upwards of three years ago I received Instructions from your predecessor General Dearborn, and Mr Jefferson the late president likewise wrote to me himself on the Subject to Select eight or ten principal Chiefs of some of the Indian Tribes in my Agency & Come with them myself to the City of Washington, & I received Enclosed in a Tin Case all the Necessary papers & passports for the purpose, which I now have; I made the Selection of Chiefs Accordingly, had Horses & Mules provided for the Journey & Sent them Over the Mississippi to the pasture of my friend Mr. Dunbar, but just as we were about setting off the Spaniards made an Irruption into the Country on this side the River Sabine, went to the Caddo Nation, menaced the Indians, Cut down & took away with them a United States Flag which I had given the Caddo Chief, persued & turned Back an exploring party ascending Red River by order of our Government under the direction of Mr Thomas Freeman, took several Citizens of the United States Prisoners within three or four Leagues of this Town & Sent them beyond the River Grand, & Com-

72 When the Secretary of War, General Dearborn, notified Sibley of his appointment as Indian agent in a letter dated October 17, 1805, he also expressed the hope that Sibley "had succeeded in making a proper impression on the Indians in the vicinity of St. Bernard Bay," and that he should secure a party of principal Chiefs, bringing them to visit the President. Secretary of War, General Dearborn, to Sibley, October 17, 1805, Letter Book B, April 1804-July 1809, 122-123, Department of Interior, Office of Indian Affairs.

73 William Dunbar, former leader of the Hunter-Dunbar expedition, who had been commissioned in 1804 to explore the Ouachita River country, and in 1805 had been appointed to explore on Red River, had a plantation, "The Forest," which was four miles east of the Mississippi, and nine miles south of Natchez. Dictionary of American Biography, V, 507-508.

74 Sibley refers to the boundary dispute between the United States and Spain in 1806. Simón Herrera, commanding 600 men, crossed the Sabine and advanced to within a few miles of Natchitoches. Claiborne, Letter Books, III, 290, 381, 383-386, 387, 389, 397-398.
mitted many Other Acts of Outrage in the face, & within the knowledge of all the Indian Tribes, who saw likewise our forbearance, which they Construed into Cowardise, or impotence in us, which had Such an effect upon the Indians that they refused to go with me, Saying when I urged them to fulfill their promise, that the Spaniards who appeared to them to be our Superiors, told them, as well as the Creole French, that the Americans would not long possess any part of this Country, that ere long we would all be driven Over the Mississippi towards the rising Sun from whence we Came, that they the Indians must See themselves our inferiority to the Spaniards. & If they ran away after us it would offend the Spaniards & then what would become of them, my voyage was of Course Suspended: But the great Caddo Chief never withdrew from me his particular Confidence & friendship, who is a man of more importance than Any other ten Chiefs on this Side of the Mississippi within my Agency, with this Man who has a Strong mind I have frequent long & friendly Conversations, in which I have entertained him in an Account of the Wars & Politicks of the World, the present & probable State of Spain etc.-------- I believe now he would readily Consent to make you a Visit & it appears to me it would be politic at this time to have it effected. for if the French Should finally Succeed in destroying the government of Spain in Europe they will put in motion every engine to gain an Interest in these Spanish provinces & will no doubt have their emmissaries Among the Indians who have always had a predilection for them.

Should you be of the Opinion from these or any other Considerations that a Visit of Six or eight principal Chiefs of Some of those tribes to the Seat of Government & Some of the principal Towns in the United States would be productive of good. I will do my endeavour to effect it in as Short a Time & at as small an expence as possible.

Should this proposal meet your approbation I shall require a Renewal of those papers Sent me by General Dearborn, and Such Other Instructions as you may be pleased to give me.75

We receive but little Intelligence from Our Neighbours the Spaniards Worth notice, the last report is, that a project is now on foot for the purpose of Uniting into one Kingdom all Spanish America to appoint for their king the brother of Charles the 4th late King of Spain.

I am
Sir with very great Respect & Esteem

Your Obt. Servt.

Honorable William Eustis
Secretary of War.

75The Secretary of War replied that since the president would not be in Washington, if the chiefs arrived in the summer, it was advisable to defer the visit to another year. Secretary of War to Sibley, April 13, 1810, Letter Book C, July 1809-December 1816, I.A.D.I.
LETTER 16

Natchitoches March 20th 1810

Sir

About Thirty Miles above this Town by land & Sixty or Seventy by water or by the Course of The River is the Village or Town of the Natchitoches Indians, their Corn fields extend up & down the River for Some Leagues, they used to live where this Town is now Situate, & the Town preserves its Antient Name & when the white People first Came here in the year 1717 all the Country belonged to them for Some hundreds of Miles, & they were a powerful nation they are now much reduced in Numbers, and a number of the French families are Mixed with them, they have lived where they now do for Many years & no one encroached upon the Lands they Claimed; till Lately, a Number of Americans have been taking up places and Commencing Settlements about them; the Chief Came to me a few days Ago with a Complaint; I have Seen Some of these Settlers who seposed (as they say) they were on Lands belonging to the United States, and intended to risque purchasing. If government would not give them, whenever an office for the Sale of Public Lands was opened, they have Agreed to Suspend their improvements for a short time. Untill I Can ascertain the Claim of the Indians & I have Concluded unless the rising of the River prevents it, to go with a Surveyor & Lay off their Lands, within whose Boundaries no one will presume to encroach. I shall have a plot of their Lands made and the lines distinctly Marked, as I had the Lands of the Appelaches below Some years ago & for the Same Cause, & Send you a duplicate of the Survey; when that is done the Indians will sign an abandonment to the United States to all their Claim to Any more as they will be Content with a small quantity of Lands, notwithstanding their equitable right to a great extent, we must suffer them to Carry their lives pretty much as they please but they will be very reasonable as there is a Necessity in Order to tranquillise the Indians to Act upon this business immediately. I shall be obliged to do it without waiting for your particular Instructions, and with as Small expence as I Can with Economy, and shall forward to you the Survey with the Account of the expence, which I hope will meet your approbation; my having done the Same in the Case of the Appelaches Lands, which met the entire approbations of General Dearborn prevents all hesitation relative to the propriety of this Measure for the Natchitoches whose Claim is a much Stronger One than that of the Appelaches.

I should feel particularly gratified should Government think proper to appropriate Some Lands for those Indians in this quarter who have none, in their present Situation they are a
great nuisance to the white Inhabitants & ungovernable. And
Instead of improving in the Arts of Civilization are growing
close.

I am
Sir Most respectfully
Your Obt. Servant
John Sibley

Honble William Eustis
Secretary of War

(To be continued)