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LETTERS AND DOCUMENTS

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

JULIA KATHRYN GARRETT

(Continued)

LETTER 4

Natchitoches April 20th. 1807

Sir

By the request of Major Freeman I have had the Boats and what of the Public property that remained at the Conchatta Village Brought down here, Corporal Read who was left with three soldiers as a guard with the Boats etc. In consequence of his behaving amiss by disposing of Some of the Property in his Charge deserted to Nacogdoches, what was brought down with the Boats are here subject to Mr. Freeman's Order. I sent Mr Philebare our Indian Interpreter to bring them down, who managed it in his own way with great discretion, he employed some Indians to assist him at a small Expense which has been paid by Mr Linnard at my request, they found considerable difficulty in passing some Rafts, those that were last year broke are again choaked. The River is very low for the Season.

We hear that Three Companies of Artillery [artillery] destined for this place are in the River a small distance below and will be here tomorrow.—A Mr Hesser formerly of Germantown near Philadel [Philadelphia] a Hatter by trade who is married & Settled here, and who is esteemed a Man of Veracity, Arrived here yesterday from Nacogdoches, where he has been on business for Some Weeks past, he says "that the day before he left Nacogdoches he Dined with Father Puelles the Priest (a good Man) and that at Dinner he received a letter from Governor Cordero23 at St. Antonio informing him (the Priest) that Governor Herrera was not Coming to Nacogdoches, & that all the troops except a Guard of between 20 & 30 that are now

23Don Antonio Cordero, governor of Coahuila, was famous as an Indian fighter, and had won distinction for his ability in dealing with frontier affairs. He had served on the frontier of New Spain since the creation of the Interior Provinces in 1793. After the purchase of Louisiana in 1803, Cordero was needed to place Texas in a state of defense, and in 1805 was made governor of Texas. Homer S. Thrall, A Pictorial History of Texas from the Earliest Visits of European Adventurers to 1879 (6th ed., rev., St. Louis, 1879), 626.
at Nacogdoches & its Vicinity are ordered to be immediately withdrawn to St. Antonio, and that no more troops are expected to be sent to Nacogdoches, that no Warlike preparations are making, but the Contrary, and it is the opinion of Mr Hesser that the Post of Nacogdoches will be broken up & the Inhabitants all Ordered Away; no new Settlements even by native Spaniards are permitted to be made, & the Inhabitants are forbidden to improve Either their farms or buildings, and all inhabitants who have not been Settled There before the Cession of Louisiana, or more than five years, whether Spanish, French, or American, are Ordered either to move Back towards St. Antonio, or into the United States, and that Inhabitants of the Spanish dominions are not permitted to come into the United States Territory or trade or On Any private business whatever, it is likewise the opinion of Mr Hesser & Several Other Intelligent persons with whom I have lately conversed from that Country that Spain will only oppose our taking possession of the Country to the extent of Our Claims by Words or threats; but never oppose force to force."

I can hear Nothing of Captain Pike, the Panis had heard nothing of him or his Party about Six days Ago [manuscript illegible] I am afraid some accident has befallen him. I cannot believe he could have found any enemies unless it be Spaniards of the St. Fee [Santa Fé] Settlement. If Mr. Freeman had Renewed his voyage up Red River I Should like to have gone with him. I Intend this Season to have a meeting with some heads of the Hietans if I can.

I allow myself to Indulge the hope that you will approve of my Son Saml. H. Sibley as an assistant to Mr Linnard.

I am
Sir with very great esteem
Your Obt. Servant
John Sibley

Genl. Henry Dearborn

24 Don Nemesio issued an order in 1805 to cut off all communication with Louisiana, and to prohibit the entrance of foreigners; only fugitive slaves were to cross the Sabine into Texas. The death penalty was imposed for the disobedience of this order. In 1808, he re-enforced this order by refusing petitions to buy needed supplies in Míchitcoches, and decreed a policy of restriction for immigrants from Louisiana, the expulsion of undesirable immigrants who had entered Texas, and the concentration of colonists at Villa de Salcedo, Béxar, or further west. Mattie Austin Hatcher, The Opening of Texas, 100, 115-118.

25 Hietans was the term Sibley applied to the Comanches. Pichardo, however, also an authority on the Indian tribes states that Sibley was mistaken. They were different. "The Hietanes were those whom the Spaniards called Yutas." Sibley describes the Hietanas as nomads intermittently occupying the area lying between the Trinity and the Brazos, crossing Red River, to the heads of the Arkansas and the Missouri, and as far as the Rio Grande. Charles Wilson Hackett, Pichardo's Treatise on the Limits of Louisiana and Texas, II, 74, 264-265.
Sir

About the 10th of May last I was informed by some friendly Chata Indians\(^2\) that they had reasons to believe that a travelling white Man had been murdered by a Creek or Conchetta [Conchatta] Indian on one of the Branches of the Bayou Cosmoschie between Red River and the Sabine about 40 Miles from this place & near the Road that Leads from Oppelousas [Opelousas] to Nacogdoches, I obtained from the Choctas [Choctaw] what information I could relative to the place where the Murder was said to have been committed, & immediately employed two men who are Acquainted with the Country to go out & make Search for the dead Body & They went, were gone three days & returned & gave information On Oath that they had found it, I then Caused a Jury of Inquest to be Summoned & went with them to the place myself, we Examined the body & the Verdict of the Jury was that they believed the Man to have been Murdered, as they found in his body five wounds which they believed to be Stabs of a Knife, the Jury took the declaration of Some Indians of good Character which Strongly Corroborated the belief that the Murder was Committed by the Conchetta Indian, one of whom declared the Indian had Confessed to him the Murder with all the Circumstances attending it, and farther that he Intended to Kill two more Americans, and that he had lurked about Natchitoches for some days to find an opportunity of Killing a Soldier, but was disappointed, he could find none; the Jury reported they believed from information they received the Murdered Man was of the name of O'Neal, and lived in some part of the Mississippi Territory, and was travelling with a Horse Packed with goods from Oppelousas [Opelousas] to Nacogdoches, the Indian took all his things & Says he killed him by way of retaliation for the Conchetta that was Killed by Watson at the Salt Works last December; all the Indians of that tribe have Since disappeared from amongst the Inhabitants, and are either at their Village on the Sabine towards its Mouth, or gone over towards the Spanish Post of the Accokesacos [Orecoquisac] on or near the Mouth of the River Trinity. And the Inhabitants think travelling the Road between this place & Oppelousas [Opelousas] dangerous. The Governor of this Territory\(^2\) has been informed of all the particulars of the affair that we know at present & it is presumed will take Some measures to protect the Inhabitants and have the Murderer punished; he has not yet been heard from on the Subject.

\(^2\)Perhaps he refers to the Chaté, a tribe of Indians living on the east bank of the Noches near its junction with the Angelina. They were on the route from Opelousas to Nacogdoches.

\(^2\)Governor W. C. C. Claiborne of Louisiana Territory.
About Eight Weeks ago the Caddo Chief sent two Special Confidential Messengers to inform me that a party of Eight Choctas [Choctaw] from the East Side of the Mississippi had fallen in to a Camp of Nandacos\(^{23}\) at or Near the Salt Spring high up on the Sabine River, and without provocation had Killed & Scalped two women & wounded others, that the Nandacos were under his protection, and he expected Satisfaction would be given. I immediately employed a Man for the Purpose who went round Amongst all the Chocta [Choctaw] Chiefs On this Side of the Mississippi, they were Alarmed and greatly distressed—at the news & came immediately in here for Protection & advice to the number of near Three hundred Persons. I met them & recommended it to them to delegate Some Chiefs who were well known & respected by the Caddo Chief to repair to his Town & in the name & in behalf of all the Chocta [Choctaw] Nation living on the West Side of the Mississippi express their Indignation to the Murders of those Women, & Acquit themselves of all Knowledge or approbation of it, with their desire to preserve inviolate on their part the peace they made at Natchitoches on the 17th of May 1804, which was Cheerfully & unanimously Agreed to, and they sat off, I sent Mr Philebare Our Caddo Interpreter with them, they were well received by the Caddos who heard with pleasure their desire to Continue in peace & amity, & the Delegation returned well Satisfied with their Mission, and a Chief was appointed to go to the great Chahta [Choctaw] Nation, and request that the leader of the party who Murdered the two Nandaco Women Should be punished, And thus the Matter rests at present; I was obliged to be at more expence of Provisions & Outfits, of Messengers etc, than I wished, when I urged The Choctas [Choctaws] to go out hunting, and return to their Cornfields, their reply was “when you Can tell us whether If we go in the Woods we are to be Killed & Scalped by those Offended Nations, or to Kill a Deer we will go,” all the other Indian Tribes in the Vicinity felt anxious about the event between the Caddos & their Allies, & the Chahta [Choctaws] and an unusual number of them came in to see & hear the News etc.——About the Same time I received a friendly visit from a Party at Panis, a Mr Lewis of Kentucky who has Spent the last winter Amongst the Panis & Hietans came in with them, the Great Panis Chiefs expressed through them a very great degree of friendliness & affection for us, I treated them with great kindness and made them some presents, I had then not

\(^{23}\)Sibley states that the English called them Nandacos. The Spaniards called them Nadacos. They lived on the banks of the Sabine far north of Nacogdoches. Sibley said that they considered themselves the same as Caddos, had the same manners, customs, and language as the Caddos, and intermarried with them. Charles Wilson Hackett, *Richardo's Treatise*, II, 183-189.
heard of the farther exploring of the River Arkensa & Red River being postponed, And wished to prepare the way for the friendly reception of the Party should they have visited the Panis Nation. I sent some presents to the great Panis Chief. They informed me that Governor Cordero of St. Antonio had last Winter Sent for them, and a Minor Chief with a Small Party had been to St. Antonio, had taken the Spaniards by the hand had Received from them a Great Many Presents in Arms, Ammunition, Horses, Mules, Saddles, Bridles, Blankets etc., and that they had brought home with them Three Stands of Spanish Colours; but that the Great Chief had refused to have them Hoisted in the Nation; but had Continued to use an United States Flag which I gave him two years Ago, the Great Chief sent to me for two other flags that they might have one for each Village. I was Sorry I had none to Send him.——— I received likewise a very friendly Message from a great Hietan Chief who with his hord had Spent Sometime near the Panis Town. Mr. Lewis was in their Camp Some days, he believes it Consisted of not less than three thousand Souls, and that he saw not less than 5000 Horses and Mules. Many of the Horses he says were large & very finely formed. I think it probable I Shall receive a Visit from a Party of them in the course of this Summer or Autumn———. Capt. Pike & Doctor Robinson will Announce to you I presume their Arrival at this place with the most Correct Accounts from the Spanish Interior. I am Correctly informed there are about 200 Spanish troops at the Accokesacos [Orcoquisac] near the Mouth of the Trinity River, last year they only had there a Sergeant & Twelve Men.

Enclosed is an acct of Some Cash expenditures which Mr Linnard has advanced for me for which Agreeable to his request I have drawn on you for the Amt.

I am

Sir with great respect & Esteem
Your Obt. Hble Servt.
John Sibley

General Henry Dearborn.

(To be continued)

\(^{29}\)Pike and Robinson had been sent out of Spanish territory by way of Texas after having been detained in Chihuahua as political prisoners by the commandant general. Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, II, 3.