Letters and Documents

Dr. John Sibley and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1803-1814

JULIA KATHRYN GARRETT

[continued]

Letter 17

Natchitoches Nov. 30th. 1810

Sir

This Side of the Mississippi River is very much Invested with Vagabond parties of Choctaw Indians, of whose Ill Conduct Complaints are Continually made. Something more than a Year Ago a party of Seven of them Murdered two Nandaco Women on the River Sabine without Any provocation whatever. Since a Camp of theirs was found between this place & the Sabine Consisting of about thirty Men, a Frenchman in the Months of April or May last Carried Some Taffia Amongst them, they got to fighting & Killed a Chief & Seven Young Men & wounded Others, but their Camp and the greater part of them went over the Sabine River into the Spanish Dominion. There is a Village of them in the Parish of Washita who are very troublesome to the Inhabitants; A man found one of them stealing in his Corn field, attempted to put him Out, the Indian resisted & would have Killed the owner of the field If he had not have Saved himself by Running, the Owner of the field got some Neighbours returned, Caught the Indian tied him & whipped him & let him go. The Indian with an armed party next day Came to the Mans House to Kill him, he hid, they Committed great Outrage at his House, put his family in Such fear, they abandoned their Home, & the Inhabitant dare not go to his Own House without An Armed party of his Neighbours to protect him from the Indians. This Case has been represented to me in a letter from the Judges of the Parish of Washita: where they live is on high land & of an Inferior quality of Soil where they plant their Corn, & their Crops Suffered for want of rain they applied to a Chief who promised to Make it rain for a Certain quantity of articles to be raised for him by Contribution. The articles were procured & delivered to him, it did not rain As was Expected & Another Chief was applied to, who told them he Could make it rain; but to appease the rain maker, the
Chief who had first undertaken it must be Killed, he was killed. Accordingly, his friends Killed the Chief who Advised his death; & they went on Killing till Thirteen Chiefs & head Man were destroyed.

About a Month Ago a Party of seven or eight Rambling Choctaws from the Village on the East of the Mississippi Called Tellehatche, little goose or little Yazaw, which means all the Same, Came to the rancheria of a Mr. Lamber a French gentleman about ten Miles from this place, where they Murdered a Mulatto Man a slave of Mr. Lamber & an Indian Woman of the Aiche Tribe, who had been raised from a Child Amongst the white People & had put off the Indian Manners, dress, etc. The Mulatto Man was shott in the House, & the Woman as the Coroners Inquest believed had her Brains Knocked Out in Attempting to Make her escape out at the Windows. No other persons were there about the place, the Indians were Seen going from it, met a Mr. Fulsome on their flight Over the Mississippi again, Near the Walnut Hills to whom they Confessed the Murder. There is a party of them On the Bayou Chico in the Parish of Oppelousas [Opelousas], Against whom great Complaints are made for their Insulting Insolence, Killing the Cattle, Hoggs, etc. of the Inhabitants, Stealing Horses, Robbing fields etc., they are generally regarded by all white People as great Pests, & detested by all other Indians & their Conduct of late has excited great uneasiness, & requires a remedy, to effect which I have had it in Contemplation to Endeavour to Collect & Settle them all at one place. Cause them to nominate their Own Chiefs or rulers, who will be responsible for the Conduct in Some degree Over whom they are appointed, to adopt for them Some Laws & Regulations, to treat those who Conform & behave well Kindly, furnish them with some Tools of agriculture etc: but to do nothing for those who refuse to become Members of that Society; in their present Lawless Vagabond State. If we punish one for a Theft or any Crime Against white people, such is their Notion of government that they attempt to retaliate upon the administrators of Our Laws upon them; I have hitherto made it a rule to treat Kindly all Indians who Come here on business; but at present I am Convinced of the Necessity of making a distinction between the good & the Ill behaved.

I have very little trouble with Any other tribes of Indians on Account of their Ill Conduct, a few Chickesaws Excepted, who are of a similar description; They are generally Peaceably disposed & well affected towards the Government of the United

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76Sibley, in referring to the Aiches, also called them Alices. De Mézières called them Ais. They lived near Nacogdoches about twelve miles West of the Sabine, were formerly a large tribe, but at this time they were almost extinct. Bolton, Athanase De Mézières, I, 118, II, 340; Hackett, Pichardo's Treatise, II, 153.
States. I have had Occasion to regret that the factory here has not been well Supplied with Amunition & Some Other Articles of the first Necessity for Indians.

Enclosed is An Account of the expenditures of this Agency for the time therein mentioned, Except of some few Articles I have received for Indians of Mr Linnard the Factor the Acct. of which will be forwarded when he furnishes me with it. the Blacksmith's Accounts I have been prevented from Sending, On Account of the One I used to employ going off a Mine hunting some hundred Of Miles Back before I Could get them of him, I have my Own Shop in operation. But find it difficult finding a Smith to my liking to manage it, & from the Expense of Iron, Steele, Coals, & the purchasing of some Tools (the Set you Ordered me being not Complete for gunwork) will not for the present allow much saving; but I now get the work done, much better, Sooner, & more of it.

A man by the Name of Jonathan Hill Platts, who says he is a Native of Boxford in Massachusetts, & has been a prisoner in the Interior of the Province of Taxus [Texas] in the Spanish Dominion Since last May has just Come here from St. Antonio, he has been with me today from whom I have received the following Information. That the Country at & towards Mexico is in a State of Revolution the Parties opposed to Each Other are the Native Americans Against the Europeans, the former are for Complet independance from all the world on republican principles the later are for Ferdinand the Seventh & Monarchy. That there has been a good deal of fighting Amongst

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77On September 16, 1810, Miguel de Hidalgo y Costilla summoned Mexicans to the revolutionary struggle, calling them to free themselves from the rule of the Spaniards. They were to establish a government controlled by Americans (natives of New Spain, an area which embraced all territory possessed by the Spanish king in North America). Americans would rule in the interest of the people, the holy religion, and their King Ferdinand VII. The Mexicans were told that the Spaniards were attempting to surrender New Spain to the French, who had occupied Spain and held their king, Ferdinand VII, a prisoner in France. The Mexicans declared they would preserve their country and themselves for Ferdinand VII. The Spaniards, their property, and the cities of Mexico became the prizes of rebels as they plundered southward from the Indian town of Dolores to Mexico City. Then the tide turned; they retreated northward driven by General Calleja, leading an army of loyalists, who supported Spain's authority. The rebels had organized as the "Army of America" with Hidalgo as generalissimo. Hidalgo took up quarters in Guadalajara; meanwhile, Mariano Jiménez had been sent to revolutionize the Northern Provinces of Mexico, and the Interior Provinces of Coahuila and Texas. For an account of the revolution see Bancroft, History of Mexico, IV, 102-240.

78Sibley is in error in stating that the revolutionists were seeking complete independence; at this time the rebels did not seek independence from Spain but freedom from the rule of European Spaniards. They declared that they were capable of governing Mexico and that they would rule their country in the interest of Mexicans and Ferdinand VII. Priestly, The Mexican Nation, 208-210.
them & that it was Said in St. Antonio about Seventeen Thousand lives on both Sides had been lost, the republican or Independent party were like to prevail. That all the regular Troops (consisting of about 300 Men) at St. Antonio had Received Orders to repair to Saltee [Saltillo] in order to Support the Monarchist who were like to be Overpowered by the Republicans. That an Ecclesiastic headed them, that a Republican Congress was to meet at Mexico, a Priest (a Young Man) had been Elected representative for St. Antonio who openly declared himself in favour of Independence. Governor Cordero had refused to take a part or Act against the republicans, who is Esteemed a Man of great Capacity & a popular Character.—A Spanish gentleman from St. Antonio passed through this place yesterday On his way to New Orleans, tis said on govt. Business. This gentleman Confirms Substantially the Account I Received from Mr Platt. This day I Received the Enclosed letter from Mr P. B. Lafitte a very Intelligent gentleman who lives in the Province of Taxus, who has every Means of Information & on whose Veracity I Rely. It Corroborates Other Accounts. It is generally thought here that in this State of our Neighbouring Country Some precautionary measures on this frontier would be proper.

I Shall Consider it my duty in future to inform you of Such Accounts from time to time as I may receive from that country to be Relied on.—A Most Inveterate hatred Exists Between the Native Americans or Creoles & the European Spaniards, Amongst the later all Public Offices have always been distributed.

with great Esteem
Your Obt. Servant
John Sibley

The Hon.ble William Eustis

Jiménez, successful in revolutionizing the northern provinces, was marching north toward Coahuila. Salcedo, fearing that revolutionary propaganda had reached Texas, appealed to that province to remain loyal, and not give ear to the false charges made by Hidalgo, while the junta in Béxar made ready to send Texas troops to save Coahuila. Alamán, Historia de México, II, 94-95; M. Salcedo to the Faithful Inhabitants of Texas, January 6, 1811, MS., Béxar Archives, The University of Texas (hereafter, Béxar Archives will be cited as B.A.); Report of the Junta of Béxar, January 8, 1811, MS., B.A.

At this time the revolutionists had not issued a call for representatives to a congress. However, this may indicate that the plans of the rebel club in Querétaro, which early in 1810 had plotted the revolution and planned to call a national congress, had reached Texas; and that Texas rebels anticipated the fulfillment of the plan for a congress. Bancroft, History of Mexico, IV, 107-163.

Lafitte’s letter translated from the French follows this letter.
Letters and Documents

Account of Expenditures of Indian department in the Agency of John Sibley of Natchitoches T. Orleans from July 1st. 1809, to September 30th. 1810. (viz).

Gunsmith's Bill for repairing Indians guns & [etc] for the quarter ending 30th. Sept. 1809 $56.37\frac{1}{2}

Do [Ditto] for Do [Ditto] ending 31st Dec. 1809 31:38\frac{1}{4}

Do for Do ending 31st March 1810 26:62\frac{1}{2}

Do for Do ending 30th June 1810 77:25

Do for Do ending 30th Sept. 1810 60:87\frac{1}{2}

1809

This sum expended for sundries bought of [two words cancelled] by lines for Conchattas Chief 7:00

Dec. 23d This sum for ammunition bot. [bought] of I. Tanzin for Caddo Chief 37:50

1810

For sundr [sundries] bot. [bought] for Nabedaches Indians 8:87\frac{1}{2}

2 Barrels Salt Distributed 10:-

This Sum expended for Tobacco 5:-

Sept. 20 Sundr [sundries] bot. [bought] for Choctaws Chief 7:- $75:37\frac{1}{2}

Amt [Amount] of ferriage at Natchitoches for 1809 20:-

Ditto. Do at Grand Ecore same year 20:-

Ditto. Do at Isle Brevel same year 10:-

Do - - Do at River Bruillie same year 10:- 50.

$377.88\frac{3}{4}

Expenses of Indian department in the Agency of the Territory of Orleans West of the Mississippi for the quarter ending the 31.st of December 1810 . . . viz

Joseph Brown account for repairing Indian guns & [etc] $24.-

For Indian ferriage cross Red River at Natchitoches for the whole of the year 1810 20.-

For the same for ferriage at Grand Ecore 20.-

Sundries purchased of A. Sompreyrae for Presents to a party of Nabedaches & a Chocta Chief. viz 1 white shirt 350c. 1s Powder. 150c. 4 Hatts 800c. flints 75c. Needles & Thread 62\frac{1}{2}

9 canot (?P Tobacco purchased for & given to Indians. 4.50

2 Barrels & sixteen quarts of salt distributed to Indians in the year 1810 11.00

The salary of Gaspard Philebere Indian Interpreter 90.00 183.87

John Sibley Indn. Agent.