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THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE IN CORRESPONDENCE OF THE TIME.

ARRANGED BY REV. DR. WILLIAM SALTER.

In 1903 the United States Government Printing Office published "State Papers and Correspondence bearing upon the Louisiana Purchase," in a volume of 299 pages. The correspondence of other public men of the time, as published in their Works,* adds further information upon the subject. The whole correspondence is heavy and voluminous. Some selections from it, arranged in chronological order, will afford a lucid, compact and authentic view of the course of events in that great crisis of American history.

That the question, "Who shall own Louisiana?" was a subject of inquiry and concern to Washington soon after he became President, appears from his correspondence of that time with Jefferson, then Secretary of State, and Hamilton, Secretary of the Treasury. War was then threatened between Great Britain and Spain.

WASHINGTON TO HAMILTON (THE SAME TO JEFFERSON).

U. S., Aug. 27, 1790.

Provided the dispute between Great Britain and Spain should come to the decision of arms, there is no doubt in my mind that New Orleans and the Spanish posts above it on the Mississippi will be among the first attempts of the former, and that the reduction of them will be undertaken from Detroit.

The consequences of having so formidable and enterprising people as the British on both our flanks and rear, with their navy in front, as they respect our western settlements, which may be seduced thereby, are obvious.

What then should be the answer of the Executive in case

*Hamilton's Works, vol. iv. Rufus King, Life and Correspondence, vols. ii, iii, iv.

Lord Dorchester* should apply for permission to march troops from Detroit to the Mississippi?

JEFFERSON TO PRESIDENT WASHINGTON.

Aug. 28, 1790.

I am so deeply impressed with the magnitude of the dangers which will attend our Government if Louisiana and the Floridas be added to the British empire, that in my opinion we ought to make ourselves parties in the general war expected to take place, should this be the only means of preventing the calamity. But we should defer this step as long as possible, because war is full of chances, which may relieve us of the necessity of interfering, so that I am for preserving neutrality as long, and entering into the war, as late as possible.

HAMILTON TO WASHINGTON.

NEW YORK, Sept. 15, 1790.

Urgent avocations (putting laws of the last session in a train of execution) and a desire of reflecting maturely, and giving the reasons for the result of my reflections fully, have caused me to delay longer than I wished the answer to the questions with which you honored me.

. . . It is not to be forgotten that we received from France in our late Revolution essential succor, and from Spain valuable countenance and some direct aid. It is not to be doubted that the part they took is to be attributed, not to an attachment to our independence or liberty, but to a desire of diminishing the power of Great Britain by severing the British empire. In the progress of the war they lent us money. France has made us one loan since. Her conduct bore the marks of a liberal policy. She did not endeavor to extract from us, as the price of it, any disadvantageous or humiliating concessions. The conduct of Spain towards us presents a picture far less favorable. The direct aid we re-

□ *Governor of Canada.

ceived from her during the war was inconsiderable. She refrained from acknowledging our independence, nor made a treaty with us; she obstructs our sharing in the navigation of the Mississippi, and has not scrupled to intrigue with leading individuals in the western country to seduce them from our interests.

. . . An increase of the means of annoying us is a certain ill consequence of the acquisition of the Floridas and Louisiana by the British, not only from contiguity to our territory, but from the increased facility of acquiring an influence over the Indian tribes in the United States.

. . . A government scarcely ever had stronger motives to avoid war than the United States at the present juncture. They have much to dread from war; much to expect from peace; something to hope from negotiation, in case of a rupture between Britain and Spain. We are just recovering from the effects of a long, arduous, and exhausting war. The people just begin to realize the sweets of repose. Our national government is in its infancy. There is a general disinclination to war in all classes. The support of public opinion (perhaps more essential to our government than to any other) could only be looked for in a war evidently resulting from necessity. To the people at large the quarrel would be apt to have the appearance of having originated in a desire of shielding Spain from the arms of Britain. It seems our true policy to cultivate neutrality.

. . . The acquisition of the Spanish territories bordering on the United States by Great Britain would be dangerous to us. The same danger, if not to the same extent, will exist, should the territories remain in the hands of Spain.*

TIMOTHY PICKERING, SECRETARY OF STATE, TO RUFUS KING,
UNITED STATES MINISTER AT LONDON.

FEB. 15, 1797. We have often heard that the French Government contemplated the repossession of Louisiana.

*Hamilton's Works, 1851, iv, 48-69.

You will see all the mischief to be apprehended from such an event; the Spaniards will certainly be more quiet and safe neighbors.

JUNE 20, 1797. We are not without apprehension that France means to renew the ancient plan of her monarch (Louis XIV), of circumscribing and encircling what now constitutes the Atlantic States. To the execution of a plan so dangerous to our union and peace, every real American must be firmly opposed.

RUFUS KING TO T. PICKERING, SECRETARY OF STATE.

LONDON, AUG. 5, 1797. The refusal to evacuate the Spanish posts (Natchez, etc.,) on the Mississippi according to the Treaty, the spoliations upon our commerce by the Spanish privateers, joined to the rumor that Spain has ceded Louisiana to France, lead me to apprehend that France has really become the proprietor of that extensive and undefined region.

RUFUS KING TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

LONDON, March 29, 1801.

The project has been discussed in the Directory, to obtain from Spain a cession of Louisiana and the Floridas. What was meditated has been executed; the cession of Tuscany to the infant Duke of Parma by the treaty between France and Austria forms a more valuable compensation to this branch of the House of Spain than was formerly thought of, and adds credit to the opinion that Spain in return has actually ceded Louisiana and the Floridas to France.

. . . I am apprehensive that Louisiana and the Floridas may be given to the French emigrants, as England once thought of giving them to the American Tories. . . . I hear that General Collot,* with a considerable number of disaffected and exiled Englishmen, Scotchmen and Irishmen, is soon to proceed from France to the United States.

*A French military officer, who had visited Louisiana in 1796.

Whether their voyage has any relation to the cession of Louisiana is matter of conjecture, but having heard it in connection with that project, I think proper to mention it to you. What effect a plain and judicious representation upon this subject to the French Government by a minister of talents and entitled to confidence, would be likely to have, is beyond my means of judging; but on this account, as well as others, it is a subject of regret that we have not such a character at this time at Paris.

LONDON, Oct. 9, 1801. Had France retained Egypt, her commercial and colonial views would have been chiefly confined to the Mediterranean. . . This enterprise having failed, St. Domingo and her other American colonies will engage her attention, and perhaps Louisiana may be coveted as an asylum for their emigrants, as England once thought of making it a refuge for ours. May the same fortune which disappointed the views of England in like manner frustrate those of France!

ROBERT TROUP TO RUFUS KING.

NEW YORK, Oct. 14, 1801.

The Chancellor (Robert R. Livingston) is here with his family on the way to the Jacobinical paradise. He will embark on the Boston frigate that has come to waft him across the ocean. Report announces that the headquarter gentleman (President Jefferson) wished him to go in a merchant vessel; but he replied with true democratic spirit that he would not go if they did not send him in a government ship.

RUFUS KING TO B. R. LIVINGSTON, PARIS.

LONDON, March 23, 1802.

We may, if we deem it to our interest, without impropriety, attempt to acquire the legitimate title to Louisiana and the Floridas. If the title can be obtained in no other way than a direct purchase, a large sum of money will alone

procure it. Great as would be the benefit to us, I see little which authorizes us to expect that a measure of such magnitude, which would impose burthens upon our people, would be received with favor.

. . . France is one of the great powers which in some sort control the affairs of the whole earth; on this account it seems the duty of those who have a part to act in the concerns of other States, to study the genius and endeavor to understand the character of this reckless and powerful nation, which can only be opposed with success, when openly opposed; I do not mean force, but moral resistance, which consists in the frank explanation of the injuries we foresee, and the declaration of our own rights and duties.

With this way of thinking, I would lose no time in telling France our apprehensions, at the same time that I assured her of our earnest desire to live in harmony and friendship; I would inform our own people that I had done so. The truth should not be disguised from ourselves or others, that we are the first power in our hemisphere, and disinclined to perform the part of the second. Sentiments of this sort openly and unostentatiously propagated would have the effect to check measures to divide us, and enable us to defeat them, should they be attempted.

R. R. LIVINGSTON TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

PARIS, Sept. 1, 1802.

There never was a Government in which less could be done by negotiation than here. There is no people, no legislature, no counsellors. One man is everything. He seldom asks advice, and never hears it unasked. His ministers are mere clerks, and his legislature and counsellors parade officers.

R. R. LIVINGSTON TO PRESIDENT JEFFERSON.

PARIS, Oct. 28, 1802.

I had an interesting conversation two days ago with Joseph Bonaparte. He said, my brother is his own coun-

seller, but we are good brothers, and I have access to him at all times. He told me that he had read my notes on Louisiana, and that he had conversed upon the subject with the First Consul, who, he found, had read them with attention, and told him that he had nothing more at heart than to be on the best terms with the United States.

R. R. LIVINGSTON TO CITIZEN BONAPARTE, FIRST CONSUL OF FRANCE AND PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC.

PARIS, Feb. 27, 1803.

A long letter on the American claims for French Spoliation on American ships, and for the cession of the Floridas and New Orleans to the United States.—*State Papers and Correspondence*, pp. 115-122.

Mr. King performed initiatory and accessorial part in the attainment of Louisiana.—*Charles J. Ingersoll*; "*Recollections*."

R. KING TO R. R. LIVINGSTON, PARIS.

LONDON, March 11, 1803.

Should we like to see the English in New Orleans, not with view of keeping it, but to prevent its going into the hands of France; perhaps to assist us in acquiring a title to, and the possession of it? If you are authorized to negotiate a purchase, would not the occupation by the English benefit your bargain, it being understood that, if we obtain the title, they would give us the possession? This is mere speculation, but may be worth consideration.

RUFUS KING TO JAMES MADISON, SECRETARY OF STATE.

LONDON, March 28, 1803.

War (against England) will probably be declared and commenced by France.

APRIL 2, 1803. In a late conversation with Mr. Addington, he observed to me, if the war happen, it would perhaps be one of their first attempts to occupy New Orleans. I interrupted him, saying, I hoped the measure would be well

weighed before it should be attempted, that true it was we could not see with indifference that country in the hands of France, but it would be equally contrary to our views, to see it in the possession of England. We had no objection to Spain continuing to possess it; they were quiet neighbors, and we looked forward without impatience to events which, in the ordinary course of things, must at no distant day annex this country to the United States. Mr. Addington desired me to be assured that England would not accept the country, were all agreed to give it to her; that were she to occupy it, it would not be to keep it, but to prevent another power from obtaining it, and this would be best effected by its belonging to the United States. I expressed acquiescence in the last part of his remark, but observed that if the country should be occupied by England, it would be suspected to be in concert with the United States, and might involve us in misunderstanding with a power with which we desired to live in peace. He said: If you can obtain it, well; but if not, we ought to prevent it going into the hand of France, though you may be assured nothing shall be done injurious to the United States.

R. R. LIVINGSTON TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

PARIS, April 11, 1803.

I have written Mr. King, pressing him to stay until a successor is appointed. The moment is so critical that we cannot justify being without a minister in England, and he is a very useful one.

MADISON TO LIVINGSTON AND MONROE, PARIS.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE, April 18, 1803.

[This letter contains a reference to British designs for the acquisition of the country now embracing Iowa and Minnesota, where British traders were carrying on a profitable fur trade.]

The anxiety which Great Britain has shown to extend her domain to the Mississippi, the uncertain extent of her

claims from the north to the south beyond the western limits of the United States, and the attention she has paid to the northwest coast of America, make it probable that she will connect with a war on this occasion, a pretension to the acquisition of the country on the west side of the Mississippi, understood to be ceded by Spain to France, or at least of that portion of it lying between that river and the Missouri. The evils involved in such an extent of her possessions in our neighborhood, and in such a hold on the Mississippi, are obvious.

RUFUS KING TO R. R. LIVINGSTON, PARIS.

LONDON, May 12, 1803.

Met Mr. Addington by appointment; spoke to him respecting the probable cession of Louisiana by France to the United States. He declared his hope that it had taken place. I alluded to the provisional expedition (by England) to occupy New Orleans. He said that would be wholly out of view if we acquired it, and on this point was very explicit that England would be satisfied if the United States obtained Louisiana.

MAY 15. R. King communicates to Lord Hawkesbury information of the treaty of cession, April 30th.

MAY 19. Lord Hawkesbury replies that his Majesty receives the intelligence with pleasure and cordial assurances of good will.

R. R. LIVINGSTON TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

PARIS, May 12, 1803.

On my arrival I found the credit and character of our Nation very low. They were considered speculators, whose god was money. The features of our statesman, drawn from caricatures in our newspapers, were viewed as likenesses, and the democracy of America was believed to be the mad Jacobonism of France. The President was considered as among the most mad, because the head of the party, and it was not doubted that his minister in France partook of his phrenzy. Some of my former friends were sent to sound

me on the subject of the existing Government here. Satisfied that nothing short of what had taken place could have lessened the calamities of France, I answered them in such a manner as to satisfy them that I meant to have no intrigues with its enemies. I avoided all connection with them, and in consequence began to acquire a degree of favor at Court.

Among the most favorite projects of the First Consul was the colonization of Louisiana. He saw in it a new Egypt, a colony to counterbalance the eastern establishment of Britain. . . . To render the acquisition still more agreeable to the people, exaggerated accounts of its fertility, etc., were sold in every print shop. My first endeavor was to remove these impressions from the minds of the people most likely to be consulted, in which I was successful. But they all told me that it was a favorite project with the First Consul, nor would any of them hear of disposing of it by sale. As he had before read with considerable attention my Notes on the relative naval force and commerce of France, England, and the United States, and paid me some compliments upon it, I got the essay, "Will it be advantageous to France to take possession of Louisiana?" under his eye. It was read with attention, and, though I think it weakened his belief in the importance of Louisiana, yet, as he does not easily relinquish his plans, he still prosecuted them though with less ardor. As I knew that his ministers seldom dared to interpose their opinions, it was necessary to apply directly to him, through the only person who was supposed to have any influence with him. Some days after, that person told me that the First Consul had read it with attention, and approved my proposition in part, not to the extent I had proposed. I am satisfied that from this period they had determined to let us have New Orleans and the territory above the Arkansas, in exchange for certain commercial advantages, but that nothing could be done until the business with Spain was terminated. This had the effect of removing every doubt relative to my sentiments of the present Gov-

ernment, and led to a kind of personal consideration I have ever since enjoyed here. . . . Two causes suspended any absolute determination: 1st. The state of the negotiation with Spain; 2nd. My want of power or instructions; while I endeavored to pave the way for something conclusive when I should receive them.

The First Consul had an idea that by taking possession of the country, he could more advantageously treat with our Government; and Talleyrand told me that everything would be arranged, but they must first take possession.

. . . A sale has always been disrelished, as I was constantly told by Talleyrand and Marbois. What I believe principally drove the First Consul to this measure was the promise he hastily made me to pay our debt fully and promptly, which he found himself in no situation to fulfil, and yet knew not how to elude, as I pressed it at every turn, and told Talleyrand and all the Consul's friends, that I had communicated it not only to the Government, but to the creditors, with the declaration that they might rely on it, as no one could believe that a man of the Consul's character, a sovereign and a soldier, could break his word.

. . . The resolutions proposed in Congress in consequence of the business of New Orleans, which I enclosed to the minister, proved we were not to be trifled with, and the probability of a rupture with England hastened their determination. They saw as M. Talleyrand told me, that if they gave what I asked (the country north of the Arkansas river), the rest was not worth keeping. This, and the impossibility of otherwise keeping faith with us, produced a determination to sell. There was a moment, even after Talleyrand called on me to set a price, that I thought the whole might drop through. It was then, he pretended he spoke without authority, that Louisiana was not theirs. But that mystery was cleared the next day.

As I believe that next to the negotiation which secured our independence, this is the most important that the United

States have ever entered into, I thought everything that led to it might interest you and the President. I wished you to be minutely acquainted with every step I had taken; my verbal communications with everybody to whom I had access, it would be impossible to detail. Nothing was neglected on my part, and I hope the issue may be acceptable to our country.

LIVINGSTON AND MONROE TO MADISON.

PARIS, May 12, 1803.

We have the pleasure to transmit to you a treaty which we have concluded with the French Republic for the purchase and cession of Louisiana. The negotiation on the part of France was committed to M. Marbois, Minister of the Treasury, whose conduct has received the sanction of his Government, as appears by the ratification of the First Consul. An acquisition of so great an extent was not contemplated by our appointment; but we are persuaded that the circumstances and considerations which induced us to make it will justify us in the measure to our Government and Country.

Before the negotiation commenced we were apprized that the First Consul had decided to offer the United States, by sale, the whole of Louisiana, and not a part of it. So that we had to decide whether we would treat for the whole, or jeopardize, if not abandon, the hope of acquiring any part. We did not long hesitate, but proceeded to treat for the whole. On mature consideration we concluded a treaty on the best terms we could obtain.

. . . The First Consul had promised Louisiana as an asylum to those who had been unfortunate in the Revolution.

. . . We received a letter from Mr. King, in which he says that in case of war, which he deemed inevitable, the British Government contemplated taking possession of New Orleans. He desired information to be communicated to that Government whether it had been ceded to the United

States, as he presumed a knowledge thereof would prevent the measure. We gave an immediate reply to his letter. We made the same communication to the British Ambassador here (Lord Whitworth), who expressed himself well satisfied with the event.

JAMES MONROE TO THE VIRGINIA SENATORS.

PARIS, May 25, 1803.

The decision to offer us the territory by sale was not the effect of any management of mine, for it took place before I reached Paris, nor of my colleague, or it would have taken place sooner. Being postponed until my arrival in France is a full proof that it was the result of the causes mentioned: an approaching rupture with England, the character our country had formed, and its pacific relations with and respect for this Government (the French Republic).

Personally I pretend to nothing but zeal and industry after I got here, a merit equally due to my colleague. It is proper to add that I expect no misrepresentation from him, and I am happy to bear testimony in the most explicit manner in favor of his zealous, sincere and diligent cooperation through the whole of this business.

LIVINGSTON AND MONROE TO MADISON.

PARIS, June 7, 1803.

We thought we could discover some symptoms of discontent in the Government with the bargain it had made. We are convinced that if the bargain was not complete, or was within the reach of the Government, that it would not take place, even on terms different from those stipulated. . . . The First Consul in the moment of chagrin at what he may consider a bad bargain (we think a good bargain for him), might have so compromitted himself as to have made the transaction a cause of future discontent between the two nations, instead of the establishment of perpetual peace.

LIVINGSTON TO MADISON.

PARIS, June 25, 1803.

You will remember that in one of my letters I request you to set on foot a negotiation with Britain for ascertaining your northwestern boundary. I was at that time endeavoring to excite an alarm here that should put us in possession of the country above the Arkansas. I have felt distressed that I never found these suggestions noticed or encouraged by our Government. But presuming they ultimately would be, I have concealed my want of powers, and acted as if I possessed them; and to this, as well as to the firm attitude our Government took, you may attribute the success of our negotiation. I hope nothing will prevent your immediate ratification, without altering a syllable of the terms. Be persuaded that France is sick of the bargain, that Spain is much dissatisfied, and that the slightest pretense will lose you the treaty. Nothing has raised the reputation of our country in Europe so high as the conduct of our Government upon this occasion.

MADISON TO R. R. LIVINGSTON.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE, July 29, 1803.

The difference in the diplomatic titles given to Mr. Monroe from that given to you, and which you understood to have ranked him above you, was the result of an error in the clerk who copied the document, which escaped attention when signed. It was not the intention of the President that any distinction of grade should be made between you. According to Vattel, the characters of Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary are of the same grade.

MADISON TO LIVINGSTON AND MONROE.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE, July 29, 1803.

In concurring with the French Government to treat for the whole of Louisiana, although the western part was not embraced by your powers, you were justified by the solid

reasons you gave for it, and I am charged by the President to express to you his entire approbation for so doing. . . . When your instructions were made out, the object was limited to the establishment of the Mississippi as our boundary. It was not presumed that more would be sought by the United States with hope of success. Nor was it to be supposed that an arrangement with Spain for returning to her the country on the other side, would not be preferred to a sale of it to the United States. It is just ground for felicitation that the crisis (war between France and England) has issued under your zealous exertions in the extensive acquisition beyond the Mississippi.

. . . The note of Mr. Livingston, stating to the French Government the idea of ceding the western country above the Arkansas, was not received here till April 5th, more than a month after the commission and instruction had been forwarded.

RUFUS KING TO CHRISTOPHER GORE.

NEW YORK, January 4, 1804.

The relinquishment of the (proposed) French expedition (from Holland) to colonize Louisiana, and the cession of Louisiana to us, is solely to be ascribed to the war with England.

. . . The overture to cede Louisiana came from France, and not from our envoys. It is due Mr. Livingston, whose zeal upon the subject had prompted him to use unwearied and various exertions to convince France of the impolicy of her expedition to Louisiana, to declare that this business was so far settled before Monroe's arrival at Paris that nothing remained for him to do but to give his consent and signature to the contract.

. . . The debates in Parliament upon the Treaty of Amiens show the strong aversion of England to the occupation of Louisiana by France, and must have satisfied both France and America that, unless vanquished, England would not consent to Louisiana being colonized by her rival.

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