

A TRIP INTO THE INDIAN COUNTRY, 1838

Below is the copy of a letter written by David W. Kilbourne to Samuel Marsh, New York, New York. The references in the first paragraphs and in the concluding portions of the letter refer to territorial legislation to settle the confusion which existed as to the legal ownership of plots of land in the half-breed section, or tract, as it was more familiarly called, which covered all of the lower part of Lee County. The land had been set aside in 1824 for half-breed indians, but in 1834, the Indians were given the right to dispose of their land. The rush of land speculators coupled with the Indians' unfamiliarity with the white man's legal rules made confusion compounded. Kilbourne and Marsh were associated with the New York Land Company for such exploitation, the Dr. Galland mentioned in the letter is Dr. Isaac Galland, likewise interested in the same land speculations.

Montrose Feby 19th 1838

Samuel Marsh Esq

Dear Sir

Your last favor under date Nov. 17th was received in about six weeks after date. On my return from St Louis Mr. Austin went to Burlington to attend to the business of the Bill then before the Council & introduced several admendments to it, after remaining there several days he returned (as they were then doing no business of consequence, excepting drinking gambling &c) [crossed out by Kilbourne] after a few days I went myself to Burlington. Doet Galland had been there for four or five weeks & his whole business to get the bill to suit him/ I offered several amendments to it—which were adopted, but we could not avoid the apointment of Commissioners of Sale as the are called in the bill. two sets of Commissioners are appointed. 1st Commissioners to receive evidence & adjudicate upon the claims—Mr. David Brigham of Mass—Mr. Edward Johnson of Mineral Point the 2d Commissioners of Sale—John Walsh[undecipherable] J. Smith Jun. Burlington, Antoin Le Claire Rock Island, Saml Marsh New York, Isaac Galland, Commerce.

The appointment of the Commissioners of Sal was a favorite project of Doet Gallands. The Commissioners to receive Evidence and to Commence their sitting at this place on the first day of may next Mr. Brigham is a man from all I can learn well qualified for the business—Is a Lawyer, & has had



D. W. Ribbowne

much experience in the investigation of land titles &c—he will remove here from Mass. on the opening of navigation The bill is now being printed & we will forward you a Copy as soon as it's done.

Returned on Saturday last from the Indian Country after an absence of two weeks—on the business of perfecting titles—and a more arduous jaunt I never had—the weather was excessively cold—& we had to sleep on the ground. I succeed in

perfecting 15 [16 is marked over in pencil] titles. Three Grantors are dead. One refused to sign because he has never reed any pay for his portions & would not sign for less than 250—which I declined paying. 2 or 3 are living on the Missouri River—Many of the 15 [16] which did convey objected against at first to doing so, for they reason that they had never reed pay (which I have no doubt is the fact) & required payment if they signed for us—Some demanded \$500s & from that down to \$10. (I started with a notice of the peace & an interpreter—Labussier [?], with whom I had much trouble. But the whole expense of the 16 including pay to the Magistrate & Interpreter (both of which went from this place) & presents to Keokuk to pay to the Grantors—horse [undecipherable] &c &c will amount to about \$15 Each portion. You can form but a faint idea of the perplexing difficulties which present themselves in this business. I have refference to this particualar business—of finding the Grantors & persuading them to sign new deeds, or in other words perfecting titles. I will venture to tax your patience by relating some of the incidents of my journey. I left here as I have before mentioned in Company with a Magistrate & Interpreter, on the 4th Inst. We had not progressed [?] far on the Prairie—when we discovered that our interpreter had provided a liberal supply of whiskey—of which he drank often & not sparingly—he soon became so much intoxicated that he could not sit on his horse—he however revived, so that he was able to ride & about 9 oclock in the Evening we arrived at a Cabin in the Prairie—when we put up for the night Enjoyed the Priviledge of sleeping on the Floor. On the Evening of the 3d day after our departure we arrived at Keo-kuks Vilage. We went to Ke-o-kuks lodge—he invited us to sleep there & ordered supper provided of which we partook with good appetits. After supper he ordered a our bed made & to our surprise a fine feather Bed was brought forward with 4 fine Blankets—he told us he kept them for white men. We introduce(d) our business to Ke-O-Kuk—& he had to assemble his braves & Council with them before any thing could be done. had we at first gone to the Grantors—Ke-O-Kuk would have Considered it as an insult to his dignity & would have frustrated

all our plans. On the evening of our arrival—Ke-O-Kuk reed a few Bottles of Whisky of which he with the other Indians partook freely—this was Wednesday evening. He promised us that he would Call his braves to gether in the morning. The next morning, he told us that they had taken too much TKu-ta-wa-pu (whisky) & Could not attend to business. Thus it continued to be Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday—Monday & Tuesday. on Wednesday they attended to business. Keokuk during the whole time had his runners out after whisky—& in some cases they had to go 12 to 15 miles. During this drinking frolic they also held their feasts Every day which were given by different families in the Vilage. They usually feast on dogs meat, when the feast is ready an invitation is sent to all the lodges when they would all attend with their wooden bowl & ladle & after singing & performing different Ceremonies from two to three hours—would then devour with the greatest possible dispatih, whatever was before them. I was informed that they had killed about 40 dogs for their feasts this winter. They are making preparations to go to war with the Sioux in the Spring, a number of the Indians are now “out” fasting & praying the great Spirit to give them success & help them to kill their enemy. Among those who are fasting—were four Half Breeds whose claims the Company own. I could not see them as no person (not even their relatives) is allowed to enter their place of retirement during their days of fasting. They fast from 20 to 40 days. Their Custom is for three to go out together—perhaps a days walk from their Vilage & after selecting an obscure place & throwing up a little Bark to shelter them—two of the number paint their faces Black & take their seats in the lodge, while the other keeps fire & supplies them with just enough food to sustain life. When they “come in” a feast is prepared for them. A day or two before I arrived at the Vilage Mathews Alias Mathews the Prophet paid them a Visit. Keokuk told me that he called on him—that he Mathias said he was the great Spirit that they the Indians were the desendants of the [two or three words, not legible] & that he had come to do them good—Ke-O-Kuk told him if he would let him fire at him with his two pistols if he did not kill him would then believe that he

was the great Spirit. Ke-O-Kuk would not allow him to sleep in his lodge but directed him to an old Indian lodge where he was permitted to spend the night, but not without all the occupants of the lodge setting up all night to watch the "strange being with the long beard" In the morning being told by some of the Whites as he claimed relationship to the Indians—he must be shaved, he "put out" He stopd at all the Vilages on the DesMoine & has been here [meaning Montrose, possibly]—but universally meets with a bad reception—as he justly deserves. Ke-O-Kuk told me that two missionarys paid him a visit not long since & that he told them they had better stay among their own people as they had ones enough—or they might stay with him on Conditions, that they would aid (?) his battles against the Sioux in the Spring. There has been Considerable excitement vs Ke-o-Kuk recently—on account of his shooting an old Squaw—believing she poisoned his son—who died while he was absent in Washington last fall. When his son was buried a brother of the deceased led one of Keokuks favorite horses to the grave & placing the bridle in one hand of the deceased shot the horse that he might ride to Heaven—This is quite a Common practice with them on burying their deceased friends. While I was at the Vilage—one of the Traders in Co with three or four others called on Keokuk to purchase his right to the possession of his Vilage for two years—as mentioned in his late treaty with the U. S. They next day they sent for him & took him in a sleigh to the trading house—where there was plenty to drink & when the purchase was completed for the sum of \$400 & the trade whose name I forbear to mention paid his $\frac{1}{4}$ of the purchase money \$100—with an old Black horse worth about \$25. The Government sent out a large quantity of Pork & Flour to the Indians last fall. Most of which soon fell into the hands of the traders for a trifling consideration—& the poor Indians now have to do without Bread & Pork or pay exhorbitant prices. I could fill a quire of paper with a relation of frauds practiced upon them—& should be happy in doing so could it reach a source where it would bring them relief. But this is a long disquisition from business. Although the law which is made may in many of its features be objectionable & perhaps in some un-

constitutional, yet I do not know that one could be obtained which would meet the case any better, there is so much jealousy existing between the parties interested in the tract. It is undoubtedly desired by all that the Commissioners appointed to investigate the Validity of Claims perform their duty—& also the Commissioners of sale—So far as to sell lands Enough to pay the other Commissioners for unless that be done I know of no way they can be paid & they will not enter upon their duties unless the Commissioners of Sale will agree to sell land to pay them. There holding demands vs the Company complain very bitterly. Mr. Burtis who holds some \$1800 visited Mr. G. last fall says he took the best Council he could get then —& that unless something is done about his demand he intends to attach the Compy interest & apply to the Chancellor for an injunction to stay all their proceedings.

In consideration of these demands we thought it best to perfect the titles in our own names—DWK & H. S. A. but should you think it unnecessary—we will Convey when you advise us to do so. We have had to advance money in perfecting the titles but hope soon to be placed in funds.

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