

INDIAN AFFAIRS IN IOWA TERRITORY, 1839-'43.

LETTER BY GOV. ROBERT LUCAS.

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT, I. T., }
BURLINGTON, JUNE, 12, 1839. }

Sir:—By the last mail I received your communication of the 16th ult., enclosing ten scales of vaccine* matter for the benefit of the Indians in this Superintendency. On the receipt of which I forthwith assigned to the Agent of the Sac and Fox Indians \$166.66 of the allowance of \$500, and three scales of the vaccine matter—and to the Agent of the Seoux Indians the residue, \$233.33 and seven scales of the vaccine matter.

Genl. Street being at this place at the time, I handed to him the scales of matter together with a copy of the instructions of the 29th of April, and your letter of the 16th ult., and authorized him to employ a physician to carry into effect the wishes of the Department. I also transmitted to Maj. Taliaferro, by mail (there being no other means of conveyance) seven scales of the vaccine matter, with copies of your letters of the 29th of April and 16th ult., with instructions to employ physicians to vaccinate the Seoux Indians—which I presume will be promptly attended to.

We labor under great inconvenience in this Superintendency for want of regular mails. We have no mail between this place and the Sac and Fox Agency, a distance of about eighty miles; and the mail to St. Peters as well as the mails from Washington City are very tardy and irregular in their arrivals. Sometimes communications are several weeks on their way from St. Peters to this place by mail, and they are usually from three to four weeks on the way from Washington City.

This being the most remote Superintendency in the U. S. from the City of Washington, or the longest in receiving intelligence from the head of the Department, I would suggest

* We preserve the Governor's quaint spelling of the words "vaccine" and "Sioux."

whether the good of the service does not require that it should be furnished at an early period in the season with the means of fulfilling all the treaty stipulations with the Indians, and the payment of their annuities promptly at the time prescribed by government.

I have not up to this date received any account of the allowances made to this Superintendency or any other information relative to the funds to be disbursed to the Indians the present year. If the disbursements are not made at an early period in the season it will be impossible for the agents and superintendents to have their annual accounts closed and transmitted to Washington City by the 1st of October, as required by the general regulations.

I suggested in a former communication, and again repeat it, that I would be thankful to receive from the Indian Department at Washington such special instructions as would enable me to fulfill with promptness and accuracy the various duties required of me as Superintendent. This being a new Superintendency I can derive no aid from former proceedings as I have no old records to refer to, neither have I the means of knowing how the business has heretofore been transacted with the Indians now residing in this superintendency. Any instructions, forms, diagrams or other documents that would aid me in acquiring a perfect knowledge of the duties pertaining to the office of superintendent, in accordance with the rules of the Department of Indian Affairs at Washington, will be thankfully received and promptly attended to.

With sincerest respect,

I am your Obt. Sert.,

ROBERT LUCAS,

Gov. & Supt. Ind. Affairs.

HON. T. HARTLEY CRAWFORD,

Commissioner of Indian Affairs,

Washington City.

BITTER COMPLAINT OF GOV. JOHN CHAMBERS.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE,
BURLINGTON, IOWA TERR'Y, 24TH FEB'Y, 1843. }

Sir:—In the pressure of executive duties towards the close of the late session of the territorial legislature, I omitted to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 28th ult., enclosing a copy of one from G. W. Ewing, Esq., to you. Mr. Ewing describes very correctly, I have no doubt, some of the many infamous practices resorted to by unprincipled men to cheat and abuse the Indians, and he might with great propriety have extended his representations to *some* of those he calls “regular traders,” whose dealings with them are characterized by the vilest extortion—a species of fraud over which the officers of your department can exercise no control or supervision, without (a case of rare occurrence) they happen to be called upon in the negotiation of a treaty, to inspect their accounts, preparatory to making a treaty provision for the payment of their claims. And even in that case all their cash dealings and exchanges for furs and skins escape examination. With all your experience and the greatest degree of information to be obtained from official sources, you cannot, I apprehend, have more than a very imperfect idea of the “regular” Indian trade. If the vengeance of Heaven is ever inflicted upon man in this life, it seems to me we must yet see some signal evidence of it among these “regular traders.” It would be worthy the labors of a casuist to determine whether the wretch who sells a diseased or stolen horse to a poor Indian, or the “regular trader” who sells him goods of no intrinsic value to him at nine hundred per cent advance on the cost, is the greater rascal.

It is deeply to be regretted that all your efforts to induce Congress to change the system have been unsuccessful. Until it is changed your utmost exertions to protect the Indian race against fraud, imposition and abuse will prove ineffectual. I have thought that if the system could even be so

modified as to compel the licensed trader to furnish sworn copies of their invoices, and submit their goods to a comparison with them and to inspection, and their books and accounts to thorough examination, and compel them to render quarterly or semi-annual abstracts of their sales on the oaths of themselves and their clerks, and a statement of all money, skins, furs, etc., received from the Indians, it might by a rigid scrutiny be made to some extent a means of restraining their extortions and frauds; but to make such a scrutiny effectual, it would be necessary to employ agents who neither resided in the Indian country or were in habits of intercourse with the traders or the Indians. I wish most sincerely that Congress in its zeal for reform would take this subject up, and that the committees on Indian affairs would, in the right spirit, consult with you on the reformation of the system. I would most cheerfully travel to Washington to afford them all the information and aid in my power. It makes my heart sick to dwell upon the injuries and injustice to which the Indian race is subjected by the injudicious system by which our intercourse with them is governed, and the utter impracticability of correcting it while the practice of sending licensed traders among them prevails. Why, sir, I acknowledge that (although personally I am not a timid man) officially I fear these "regular traders," because I cannot, by any power I possess, or influence I can obtain or exert, control, treat with, or influence the Indians in opposition to their interests or wishes. Nor does the evil stop there. When a treaty is to be made and their claims against the Indians are to be liquidated, some of them come prepared to show your commissioners the hazard they incur in disobliging them, by a curtailment of their iniquitous demands. Letters from distinguished senators and members of Congress are presented, introducing them as strangers, (though well known) and recommending them as gentlemen of integrity, high standing and great influence, and I suppose they might, in great truth add, what would be equivalent to all the rest, distin-

guished for their *great wealth*, acquired in the Indian trade. I feel painfully the necessity of making the best of things *as they are*, having no power to correct the evils out of which they have grown, and by which they are supported; but I hope to live to see the time in which the necessity of yielding to circumstances will no longer exist, and if so I will certainly endeavor to place some of those "distinguished" gentlemen before the councils of the nation in their true character.

In the examination of the accounts of the traders against the Sac and Fox Indians at the late treaty with them, it was found in one instance that the advance upon the cost of the goods charged to the tribe, ranged from one hundred to nine hundred per cent., and that the articles charged at the highest rate of profit were, in most instances, those of least actual use or value to them. And now what power, I would ask, have you or your subordinates to correct such abuses? You have no power I apprehend to dictate the advance these people shall be permitted to charge the Indians upon the cost of their goods, or what description of goods they shall deal in; if not, it is a matter of *conscience* with them. If you are called upon in the negotiation of a treaty to make provision for the payment of the claims of these traders against the Indians, you can subject them to an examination of their accounts, and can curtail them if manifestly unreasonable; but suppose they are so much so as to amount to extortion, can your superintendent of Indian Affairs, or Agent, or commissioner, take the ground that the license under which such extortion has been committed ought to be revoked? And if he did what would be the consequences? Why, that scores of members of Congress would be brought forward to support the aggrieved "regular trader" and prove his high character for integrity, fair dealing, etc., and by implication that he was persecuted by some petty government functionary.

But I am intruding a very long letter upon you, perhaps unnecessarily, and certainly, on what would not appear to a

stranger unacquainted with the subject to be a very appropriate occasion for discussing the merits of our system of Indian intercourse; but you will understand the feeling which induces me to place these "regular traders" in juxtaposition with the *irregular*, complained of by Mr. Ewing, and will I trust excuse the length to which it has spun out this communication.

Your instructions growing out of Mr. Ewing's letter will be communicated to the agents in this superintendency, with strict injunctions to effect their object as far as practicable.

I send you enclosed a copy of an act passed at the recent session of the territorial legislature, to prevent and punish the offense of selling intoxicating liquors to the Indians; it is not what I wished, but the best I could obtain.

Very respectfully your ob't Serv't,

JOHN CHAMBERS.

T. HARTLEY CRAWFORD, ESQ.,

Comr. Ind. Affairs, Department of War,

Washington City.

THE PRINTING of the public laws of the territory in the newspapers we consider of the highest importance to the public. Our farmers and mechanics should be made acquainted with all laws of a public bearing, and there is no manner in which their circulation can be diffused more widely than through the columns of a public journal. We therefore hope that the legislature will select three or four papers in the territory in which to publish the laws, either at a fixed compensation, or at a stated price per page of the printed laws.—*Davenport (Iowa) Sun*, Nov. 14, 1840.

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