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Letter from the Secretary of War, in relation to the necessity of additional clerks in the Office of Indian Affairs

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LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

IN RELATION

To the necessity of additional clerks in the Office of Indian Affairs.

JANUARY 7, 1839.

Submitted by Mr. WHITE, and referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

JANUARY 18, 1839.

Ordered to be printed, to accompany Senate bill No. 208.

WAR DEPARTMENT, *December 15, 1838.*

SIR: I have the honor to submit, for the consideration and action of the committee of which you are chairman, the accompanying report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, asking for additional clerical force, and beg leave to express my concurrence in the importance of a compliance with his suggestions.

Very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

J. R. POINSETT.

Hon. H. L. WHITE,

Chairman Committee on Indian Affairs, Senate.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Office Indian Affairs, December 13, 1838.

SIR: Until about two years ago, the numerous papers on file in this office were not so registered that they can be referred to or found when called for or wanted, with any certainty. Previously to the time mentioned, the entries made on papers filed, and of their contents in record books, were so general as to afford no clue to their contents, unless by a special examination of each. When it is considered how extensive are the correspondence, daily communications, reports, and orders, received at and sent from the office, it will be seen at once that the constant examinations of papers behind the time stated, which are indispensable to an understanding of the multifarious business of the bureau, and frequently made necessary by calls for information by Congress and individuals, are inconsistent with the proper despatch of the current business. Besides, and almost as important, is the uncertainty, when you have gone through the labor, that

you have all the papers that relate to a given subject. This is not merely an inconvenience, but a positive evil. I propose, as a remedy, that there should be compiled a full general index, or compend, of the papers of the office from its origin, (except those of the last two years, which have been properly endorsed and registered,) so that, when required, they can be resorted to without difficulty. This work, from the best information I have gained, will occupy a competent man from two to three years. The person to be employed on such a duty should be not merely of capacity, but confidential, and I presume could not be had at a salary less than \$1,400 per annum. I therefore respectfully recommend that an appropriation of that sum for three years be asked for, to enable the department to employ a capable and faithful man to perform the proposed duty.

An additional clerk was necessary at the finance desk of the office, to keep up and despatch the business in this, its most important branch. I therefore transferred the recording clerk (who had long experience in the bureau) to this duty, and, with your sanction, employed a clerk temporarily, to be paid out of the contingent fund applicable to such purposes, until Congress could be requested to make an appropriation of \$1,000 per annum for a permanent recording clerk; which I respectfully recommend may be asked.

There is no proper record kept of Government property distributed through the Indian office. There was an attempt, a few years ago, to keep such a book, but it was altogether imperfect, and affords no information to be relied on. Blankets, rifles, agricultural implements, blacksmiths' tools and materials, and a variety of other expensive and valuable articles are annually bought and distributed to the Indians, and for their use, under treaties, of which the chief accounts here are preserved on papers, or registered orders and letters. I think an account should be opened with each agent charged with the duty of distribution, in which he should be debited with the property furnished him, and from which he should not be released, but on the production of the receipts of those entitled to them, so that it could be seen at a glance how, or whether, the duty confided had been performed. There is full employment for every gentleman in the office, and if you should concur with me in thinking it important that this item of expenditure ought to be made matter of record, I have respectfully to ask that an appropriation by Congress of \$1,000 per annum may be recommended to pay a clerk for the purpose.

With the proposed addition to the force of the office, it appears to me great improvement may be effected, if it is not indispensable to the proper conduct of business. As mentioned, a temporary recording clerk was found necessary, and has been employed. If he shall be made permanent, the business can proceed as heretofore. The others are required for the improvements contemplated. A bill was reported at the last session, authorizing the employment of four additional clerks at \$1,000 each. What I desire now is, one for three years at \$1,400, and two permanently at \$1,000 each.

I am, very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

T. HARTLEY CRAWFORD.

Hon. J. R. POINSETT,
Secretary of War.