

3-19-1840

Letter from the Secretary of War, in reply to a resolution of the House of Representatives of 24th ult., in relation to troops employed to guard the payment of annuities to Indians on the Des Moines River

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#### Recommended Citation

H.R. Doc. No. 147, 26th Cong., 1st Sess. (1840)

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PAYMENT OF ANNUITIES TO INDIANS ON THE DES MOINES  
RIVER.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

IN REPLY

*To a resolution of the House of Representatives of 24th ult., in relation to troops employed to guard the payment of annuities to Indians on the Des Moines river.*

MARCH 19, 1840.

Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

WAR DEPARTMENT, March 13, 1840.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit, herewith, a report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, in answer to a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 24th ultimo, calling upon this department to communicate such information as it may be possessed of, relative to the causes requiring troops to guard the payments of annuities to Indians on the Des Moines river.

Very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

J. R. POINSETT.

Hon. R. M. T. HUNTER,  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
*Office Indian Affairs, March 9, 1840.*

SIR: The House of Representatives, on the 24th February last "*Resolved*," That the Secretary of War communicate to this House such information as he may be possessed of, relative to the causes requiring troops to guard the payments of annuities to Indians on the Des Moines river; whether such necessity, if it does exist, has not arisen from the fraudulent influence exercised by traders over the Indian agent, and whether the furnishing troops was not requested by the agent." on which I have the honor to report:

The law of 5th July, 1838, having deprived the department of the services of military gentlemen as disbursing agents, and no other legal pro-  
Blair & Rives, printers.

vision having been made, it became necessary to employ the superintendents and agents to pay the annuities and make other disbursements, and to lay down rules for their guidance therein. Additional regulations were accordingly draughted, and sanctioned by you on the 23d March, 1839, which were transmitted to both Houses of Congress early in the present session, in an appendix to the annual report of this office. The 12th of these provides that "when an annuity is about to be paid, the Secretary of War will order a military officer (when one can be had for the purpose) to attend at the point of payment, carrying with him a small number of soldiers (say fifteen or twenty) to preserve order, exclude the sale and prevent the use of ardent spirits, to protect the Indians from losing the benefits intended them by the Government, either by their own improvidence or the acts of others, and generally to enforce the intercourse laws." I considered this regulation important, and on the 13th June last addressed a communication to you reciting it, and transmitted a statement showing the various Indian tribes receiving annuities, and the military posts nearest to the points of payment, with a request that the commanding officers of those posts may be severally instructed to provide the small force required, upon receiving notice, from the agent of this office who will distribute the annuity moneys, of the time and place of payment. This list was sent by you to the commanding general, with instructions to issue the orders desired; who did so, I understand, by a circular of the 18th June. No official report has been received at the office of the Adjutant General of the presence of troops at the Des Moines agency when the annuity was paid; but I should suppose it probable, were it not for a letter received from the agent, which will be noticed at the close of this report, that a small detachment from Fort Crawford, according to the requirement of the regulation, was present, the causes of which are set forth in the regulation itself; the notoriety of the evils which surround the Indians on such occasions making it, in my judgment, a duty to protect them by this the only means that occurred to me as likely to be effective, and which was extended to all the tribes. Copies of the regulations were sent to the respective agents; and, if they did not, they ought to have made a demand for the few troops ordered.

I am not informed of any "fraudulent influence exercised by traders over the Indian agent" on the Des Moines; and from that circumstance, as well as what has been before said, it will be seen that the necessity for troops at that agency, when the annuities were paid, did not arise from such influence. There is on file a letter from the Hon. W. W. Chapman, of Iowa, under date of 29th November last, preferring certain charges against General Street, the agent, and among them an "undue influence" by the "Fur Company;" but it is not charged in that letter to be a *fraudulent* influence. On the 3d instant the depositions of Francis Labussier, Jeremiah Smith, jr., and Samuel J. Parker, were received at this office, without other communication, detailing certain facts as having occurred at the annuity payment of last year. Immediately after the receipt, on the 30th November, of Mr. Chapman's letter, (viz: 2d December,) copies of it were sent to General Street and Governor Lucas, calling on the former for explanation, and upon the latter for "an expression of his opinion on the subject, and a report of such facts relating to the charges as may be known to you." A letter was received from Governor Lucas on the 6th January last, under date of 20th December, acknowledging receipt of the above, and saying he had forwarded charges to General Street, and as soon as he received his expla-

nations they should be transmitted ; but stating that the agent was dangerously ill, which might occasion delay. On the 7th January a copy of Governor Lucas's letter was sent to Mr. Chapman, with the information that, when further reports were made, the matter would be decided.

In answer to the last part of the call, I report that a letter was received at this office from the Sac and Fox agent, on the 17th May last, under date of 18th April, in which he says : "Quantities of whiskey are freely dispensed to the Indians each year, from early in the spring until the payment. Last payment, a number of small traders and whiskey-venders came to the payment at the agency, and were troublesome to the agent and paymaster, and harassing to the Indians ; and it was with some difficulty they were kept off, so as to permit the officers and agent to meet and pay the Indians, and make the requisite address to them, in the performance of their duty. I therefore would respectfully request that a military officer, with a small detachment of troops, might be directed to attend the payment this year." In another letter, addressed to Governor Lucas by the agent, under date of 15th October last, and received at this department under cover from the former on the 12th November, will be found the following : "After the payment of this year, and the threats of personal injury to the agent and the Indians, and the real apprehension that drinking men made the Indians feel, I hope no order for the payment will take place without an order for military forces to attend during the time of payment, and for twenty days after its close at the agency. This will give the Indians time to get off on their buffalo hunt after the payment."

From the last letter it may be inferred that no military detachment attended the payment of the annuity.

Very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

T. HARTLEY CRAWFORD.

HON. J. R. POINSETT,  
*Secretary of War.*