

1-7-1868

Letter from the Secretary of the Interior,
transmitting a copy of a communication from the
Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs relative to
the great destitution of the Sioux Indians, near
Devil's Lake, Dakota Territory

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>

 Part of the [Indian and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

H.R. Exec. Doc. No. 76, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1868)

This House Executive Document is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact darinfox@ou.edu.

DESTITUTION OF SIOUX INDIANS.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,

TRANSMITTING

A copy of a communication from the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs relative to the great destitution of the Sioux Indians, near Devil's lake, Dakota Territory.

JANUARY 7, 1868.—Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs and ordered to be printed.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, D. C., January 7, 1868.

SIR: I transmit herewith a copy of a communication dated the 6th instant, from the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, with the papers therein referred to, setting forth the destitution of the Sioux Indians, near Devil's lake, Dakota Territory, and recommending that an appropriation be made by Congress for their relief, &c.

In addition to the papers furnished from the Indian Bureau, I submit also herewith a copy of a letter from General H. H. Sibley, of St. Paul, Minnesota, to me, dated December 28, 1867, a copy of my telegram addressed to him, on the 3d instant, and a copy of his telegram to me in reply, of the same date.

There is no appropriation at the control of this department which can be applied to the relief of these Indians, except a balance of an appropriation of about \$10,000, for the "subsistence of Indians" generally.

It is not expedient to apply the whole of this to their relief; and even if it could be done, it would supply their immediate and pressing wants for only a very brief period.

Immediate attention to this subject is respectfully invited. The case is urgent, and delay may defeat the beneficial results which it is hoped will be attained by early and favorable action.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

O. H. BROWNING, *Secretary.*

Hon. SCHUYLER COLFAX,
Speaker House of Representatives.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Washington, D. C., January 6, 1868.

SIR: I have the honor to enclose herewith copies of three communications from Benjamin Thompson, esq., United States agent for the Sioux Indians, located near Lake Traverse, and one from C. A. Ruffee, esq., setting forth the pressing necessities of the Sioux Indians at Devil's lake; and in connection therewith I have to state that the sixth article (as amended) of the treaty with said Indians of February 19, 1867, ratified April 15, 1857, states that in consideration of the destitution of said Indians, Congress will, in its own discretion, from time to time make such appropriations as may be deemed requisite to enable said Indians to return to an agricultural life, &c., &c.

The seventh article (as amended) of same treaty provides that whenever there shall be five hundred persons of said bands permanently located upon the Devil's Lake reservation, there shall be an agent or other competent person appointed to superintend, at that place, the agricultural, educational, and mechanical interests of said bands.

From representations made to this office that that number of said Indians have located at Devil's lake and are in a suffering condition, I have respectfully to suggest that the attention of Congress be called to the matter, and that an agent be provided to take charge of them, at a salary not to exceed \$2,000 per annum.

Also, that the sum of forty thousand dollars (\$40,000) be requested to be appropriated to relieve their present necessities, to be placed at the disposal of your department at an early day. The treaty, before being amended, provided for the appropriation of \$100,000, but it is believed that the amount above named will be sufficient at present, and should be appropriated at once, as, in the opinion of this office, it will tend to prevent disturbances and depredations, which they would be obliged to commit in order to obtain the necessaries of life. A copy of the treaty referred to is also enclosed herewith.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

CHARLES E. MIX,
Acting Commissioner.

Hon. O. H. BROWNING,
Secretary of the Interior.

SAINT PAUL, *October 17, 1867.*

SIR: I have information forwarded to me I consider reliable beyond question, stating that fifty-seven lodges, or something over two hundred and fifty Indians, have been into Devil's lake, claiming assistance from the government, and expecting to be aided thereby. They are straggling families from Standing Buffalo's, Uanatan, and Rattling Moccasin's bands, and have sent word to me they desire to winter and remain there.

I am assured from families that have recently arrived at Lake Traverse from the far north, a larger number than I have stated will be in, this winter, at Devil's lake.

In justice to these people it is proper to state the northern mail to Montana, carried by C. A. Ruffee, esq., has passed through their country and frequently been met by them, as well as the transportation trains from Fort Stevens, on the Missouri, to Fort Totten, at Devil's lake, without hindrance or interference in any way.

In view of these facts I believe that fifty barrels of flour, two thousand pounds of pemican, three hundred blankets, ten pieces cloth, ten pieces of lindsey, five

pieces calico, five pieces jeans, and one hundred pounds of tobacco should be forwarded to meet their immediate necessities.

If the department concurs, an answer by telegraph should be sent to me here, as I propose to start for Fort Ransom on Monday, the 28th instant, to meet the commandant of that post, at his request, on matters referring to the Indians in that vicinity, and it is very desirable I should know the views of the department before I leave here for that post.

The rigors of our season are so rapidly approaching, I would suggest that the supplies be purchased at St. Cloud, and the goods could be obtained from Major J. R. Brown at Lake Traverse, and, with reasonable exertion, there is little doubt but they can be got through.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

BENJ. THOMPSON,
United States Indian Agent

Hon. N. G. TAYLOR,
Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C.

SAINT PAUL, November 29, 1867.

SIR: I have made such statements to Major General A. G. Terry, commanding this military district, as has induced him to order one hundred and fifty barrels of flour and one hundred barrels of pork, that have been condemned at Fort Wadsworth, to be turned over to me for distribution to the Indians under my charge.

I can now, probably, spare fifty barrels of flour and ten barrels of pork from the Lake Traverse supplies to the Indians coming in on the Devil's Lake reservation, (as recommended by my letter to your department of the 17th of October,) should you instruct me to do so, and enable me to pay the transportation thereof.

If this is undertaken, it should be done at once, as the severity of our seasons may prevent its being forwarded.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

BENJ. THOMPSON,
United States Indian Agent.

Hon. N. G. TAYLOR,
Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C.

SAINT PAUL, December 14, 1867.

SIR: I received on the 12th instant a communication from Edw. W. Smith, assistant adjutant general for the department of Dakota, informing me Major General A. B. Eaton, Commissary General of Subsistence, has decided that under paragraph twelve hundred and three, (1203,) Army Regulations, the supplies which were to have been turned over to me in bulk, as ordered by Brevet Major General Terry, cannot be so issued, and will not be applicable, as I supposed when I wrote you on the 29th ultimo.

I am in receipt of a letter from Charles Grant, esq., dated at Pembina on the 26th November, which informed me that on the 10th of that month there were over eighty lodges of Indians at Devil's lake, and on Sheyenne river in that vicinity, in the greatest destitution, and depending on the government for assistance. For the credibility of Mr. Grant I refer you to either of our senators, or to any of the Minnesota delegation in Congress. He was several times elected to the territorial legislature of Minnesota, and is well known as a reliable man.

Mr. J. R. Folsom, Agent C. A. Ruffee, esq., of the northern overland mail route, writes to me, also, that when he left Fort Totten, some ten days later, there

were about one hundred and thirty lodges in that vicinity, many of which have recently come in nearly naked, and without anything to live upon or the means to obtain subsistence.

The importance of assisting these people I have already called the attention of your department to by letter of the 17th October and by estimates accompanying my report. Permit me to state, I regard it as very necessary to the public interest and of greatly increasing importance that the Indians should have extended to them some assistance, and desire to state it as my mature judgment that some efficient person (and I would suggest Mr. I. C. Ramsey) should be immediately sent forward with supplies and some substantial goods, while it is practicable to do so.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

BENJ. THOMPSON,
United States Indian Agent.

Hon. N. G. TAYLOR,
Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *December 2, 1867.*

SIR: In compliance with your verbal request, I have the honor to submit the following for your consideration:

During the past summer I was engaged in locating and establishing the Northern Overland Mail Route (No. 13,811) from Abererombie, Dakota Territory, to Helena, Montana Territory, for which route I have the contract of carrying the United States mails.

The country through which this route passes is occupied and claimed by the Wapatoms, Sissetons, Yanktonais, and other bands of the Dakota or Sioux Indians. The majority of these Indians (probably 500 families) rendezvous during the greater part of the year, at Devil's lake, by reason of its being peculiarly adapted to their necessities. I met last summer, on my route, the notorious chiefs of these Indians, Standing Buffalo and Wanate, with others of less note; and they all expressed a willingness and desire to live on friendly terms with the whites. It will be remembered that many of these Indians were formerly located on the frontier of Minnesota, and some of them had become partially civilized. These Indians still retain a desire to adopt the modes of civilization and cultivate the soil, and, I am persuaded, would do so if the government would extend to them a helping hand. Article seven of the treaty with the Sisseton and Wapaton bands, ratified and concluded May 2, 1867, provides "that whenever there shall be 500 persons of said bands permanently located upon the Devil's Lake reservation, there shall be an agent or other competent person appointed at that place to superintend the agricultural, educational, and mechanical interests of said bands."

I am confident, from my observations during the past summer, that if a competent and reliable person was so placed in charge of the interests of these Indians, their welfare would be promoted and they would adapt themselves more readily than ever to the habits of civilization and industry, and I believe that the wandering bands of these Indians would concentrate at the reservation on Devil's lake so soon as it became known to them that an agent had been so appointed.

With these Indians thus under the protection and guidance of the government it is reasonable to suppose that the more remote and unfriendly Indians, located west of the Missouri river, could be more easily approached and persuaded to make terms of permanent peace with the whites.

In order to carry out the objects herein contemplated, it will be necessary to furnish these Indians at Devil's lake with all the necessary farming implements,

together with cattle, wagons, &c.; also the requisite quantity of seeds adapted to that climate.

I would further suggest that at least six months, subsistence be furnished them, to enable them to live while their first crop is being grown.

Let the government do this, and, in my humble judgment, it will lead to a lasting peace with all the various tribes of the plains and the promotion of their welfare, besides throwing open to the advance of emigration that vast extent of fertile country lying between the Red River of the North and the inexhaustible gold and silver mines of Idaho, Montana, and the Pacific coast.

The great tide of emigration which is now so rapidly flowing toward those Territories will naturally take this route, it being the most practicable, as it is by far the shortest route to the Pacific, and traverses a country well adapted to the home emigrant and the wants of American civilization.

I have the honor to be your obedient servant,

C. A. RUFFEE.

Hon. CHARLES E. MIX,

Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

SAINT PAUL, MINN., *December 28, 1867.*

SIR: I have the honor to represent that late and reliable information from the Indian reservation at Devil's lake represents the condition of the Dakota or Sioux bands gathered there to be in the last degree deplorable. They are almost naked and starving, barely subsisting on what fish they can obtain, and as there are no buffalo or other game at this season, they must receive speedy succor, or many of them will perish. In view of the pressing nature of the call for aid, Governor Marshall, Bishop Whipple, and myself have recommended to Major Benjamin Thompson, the United States Indian agent, to adopt immediate measures to relieve these Indians, stating our conviction that the department will approve any reasonable action he may take in the premises.

It has been the object of the government, for the past five years, to collect the bands of Dakotas north and east of the Missouri river, and place them upon reservations. The bands at Devil's lake, having abandoned their hostile attitude, expect the promises of the government to be fulfilled, and as they have received neither provisions nor clothing up to this time, I respectfully urge that, unless they receive speedy succor, they will be driven by sheer necessity to resume their habits of pillage of the whites, and thus renew hostilities which it has cost a large expenditure of blood and treasure to bring to a close.

I beg leave, respectfully, to refer you to Hon. Alexander Ramsey, United States senator, for any proof you may require of the standing and character of the writer.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

H. H. SIBLEY,

Late Brevet Major General U. S. Vols.

Hon. O. H. BROWNING,

Secretary of the Interior, Washington City, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, D. C., January 3, 1868.

General H. H. SIBLEY, *St. Paul, Minnesota:*

How many Indians are at Devil's lake? What amount of money will be needed to supply their immediate wants? Answer by telegraph.

O. H. BROWNING, *Secretary.*

[Telegram.—Received at Washington January 3, 1868.]

SAINT PAUL, MINN., *January 3, 1868.*

Hon. O. H. BROWNING, *Secretary of the Interior:*

Your telegram received. There are probably six hundred (600) Indians at Devil's lake, naked and starving. Forty or fifty thousand dollars should be expended immediately to save them I wrote you on the subject three days ago.

H. H. SIBLEY.