

University of Oklahoma College of Law

University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons

American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899

1-28-1886

Message from the President of the United States, transmitting a communication from the Secretary of the Interior, relative to legislation for the Chippewa Indians in Minnesota.

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



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

Recommended Citation

S. Exec. Doc. No. 44, 49th Cong., 1st Sess. (1886)

This Senate 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 Law-LibraryDigitalCommons@ou.edu.

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

TRANSMITTING

A communication from the Secretary of the Interior, relative to legislation for the Chippewa Indians in Minnesota.

JANUARY 25, 1886.—Read and referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs and ordered to be printed.

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

I transmit herewith a communication of 16th instant, from the Secretary of the Interior, submitting, with accompanying papers, a draught of proposed legislation, providing for negotiations with the various tribes and bands of Chippewa Indians in the State of Minnesota, with a view to the improvement of their present condition.

It is requested that the matter may have early attention, consideration, and action by Congress.

GROVER CLEVELAND.

EXECUTIVE MANSION,
January 25, 1886.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, January 16, 1886.

TO THE PRESIDENT:

I have the honor to submit herewith a report of 14th instant from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, presenting, with recommendation, an item which he suggests be inserted in the Indian appropriation bill, providing for negotiations with the several tribes and bands of Chippewa Indians in the State of Minnesota for modification of existing treaties, &c.

A copy of a letter from Bishop Whipple, of Minnesota, on the condition of these Indians, accompanies the report of the Commissioner.

The object sought to be obtained by the proposed legislation, which has my concurrence, is the gathering together and placing upon the White Earth Reservation, in said State, of the various tribes and bands of said Indians who are now either located upon minor reservations or wandering at large through the State. The Commissioner informs this Department that the Indians upon the White Earth Reservation are desirous of making arrangements for the proposed consolidation, and

states that the measure proposed has long been a most desirable object of accomplishment for the improvement of the condition of the Indians referred to.

I therefore respectfully request that the subject may be presented to Congress for the early attention and action of that body.

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

L. Q. C. LAMAR,
Secretary.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Washington, January 14, 1886.

The Hon. SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR :

SIR : I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt, by your reference the 16th ultimo for my "careful consideration," of a communication from Right Rev. Bishop Whipple, of Minnesota, dated October 14, 1885, suggesting the advisability of calling the chiefs of the several bands of Chippewa Indians in said State to this city, with a view to negotiating an agreement through them for the removal and consolidation of the several tribes and bands of said Indians on the White Earth Reservation, said State.

Since the receipt of said communication, a paper in the form of a petition has been received from the chiefs and headmen of the White Earth Reservation, asking that a delegation from said reservation be permitted to visit Washington to urge the proposed consolidation and consult upon other matters.

Upon this subject I have to state that the removal and consolidation of the various bands of Chippewas now occupying separate reservations in Minnesota, as well as the scattered bands who reside outside the limits of the reservations to which they respectively belong, has long been felt to be a most desirable object of accomplishment.

The friends of the Indians have persistently urged the movement, and bills have repeatedly been introduced in Congress, having that object in view.

The Indians it is proposed to remove to White Earth now occupy reservations in Minnesota as follows : Lake Winnebagoshish (which includes Cass Lake and White Oak Point), Leech Lake, Mille Lac, Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Boise Forte, Deer Creek, and Vermillion Lake. Besides these there are a large number scattered throughout the State, belonging to one or the other of the several bands occupying these reservations, whom it is equally desirable to place on the White Earth Reservation.

I do not deem it essential that the particulars in each case should be stated, or that the conditions and wants of the several tribes or bands should be discussed separately in detail. Their condition is very much the same. If not in all respects equally deplorable, it is safe to say that they are all rapidly retrograding, and, if left as they are, it will not be long before they are reduced to a condition of utter hopelessness.

The consolidation of the Chippewas on the White Earth Reservation appears to have been a popular theme in the reports and correspondence of this office for years. The annual reports and other records abound in suggestions and recommendations having that object in view, and yet nothing satisfactory has been accomplished.

Every one who has visited the Indians in an official capacity and looked into their condition, whether inspector, special agent, or agent in charge, has had the same story to tell of idleness, poverty, and steadily-increasing degradation. So of the missionaries and other friends who have had occasion to go amongst them. All have borne testimony to the wretchedness of their condition, at least as regards the larger portion of them, and there seems to have been but one opinion as to the proper remedy to be applied—removal to the White Earth Reservation.

Take the case of the Mille Lac band, by way of illustration. They occupy a reservation east of the Mississippi River, near the center of the State, which they ceded to the United States in 1863, reserving the right to remain there during good behavior. The stipulation in regard to continued occupancy was—

That owing to the heretofore good conduct of the Mille Lac Indians they shall not be compelled to remove so long as they do not in any way interfere with or in any manner molest the persons or property of the whites.

Although they have thus far managed to avoid a forfeiture of their right to remain on the ceded lands, the feeble tenure by which they have held them has been a great obstacle to their advancement, and has prevented anything being done for their improvement and advancement toward civilization.

The Indians have never been willing to remove, and their right of occupancy has thus far been respected by the Government, to the exclusion of white settlers who have long been clamoring for possession.

There has been a strong pressure from the outside for their removal, owing to the fact that the reservation is rich in pine timber. This, being known to the Indians, has had a tendency to increase their opposition to removal, and it would seem that their chief aim and ambition has been simply to avoid a forfeiture of their rights on the reservation.

Their present condition is most pitiable. Their reservation is almost worthless for agricultural purposes, their scanty food supply being obtained from the natural products of the soil—roots and berries—or by hunting and fishing.

What little money they obtain is mostly spent for whisky, and although effort has been made to break up the traffic with them, drunkenness and vagabondism has been on the steady increase.

Inspector Armstrong, who visited them in October last, speaks as follows:

The Mille Lac Indians number about 950. They are now drifting along the settlements and railroad towns, bartering berries and prostituting their women for whisky. They are a drunken, idle, and worthless lot of Indians. They can be seen at the stations, and many travelers form their ideas of Indians from seeing these miserable specimens. They should be gathered together and forced to go upon the White Earth Reservation, where they properly belong.

Rev. T. A. Gilfillan, a well known and highly respected missionary amongst the Chippewas for over thirteen years, says:

The condition of the Mille Lac band scattered from within forty miles of Minneapolis, along by Mille Lacs to Brainerd, and of the White Oak Point band scattered from the line of the Northern Pacific Railroad to Lake Winnebagoishish, over a vast country, is most dreadful.

It is the open, festering sore of the State of Minnesota, and one that calls for instant attention from all who have any feelings of humanity. The white people about Mille Lac have very properly petitioned for the removal of these Indians to the White Earth Reservation, where they own jointly with those now there, but if the door be closed against them, where are they to go? * * *

As I have visited every two months or oftener the Indians on the Red Lake, Cass Lake, Lake Winnebagoishish, and Leech Lake Reservations, and have done so for

years, and know them personally and speak their language, as well as visiting at rare intervals the Mille Lacs and White Oak Point bands, I ought to know something of what I speak. The Red Lake Indians are not suffering much from the evils spoken of, and perhaps need not be removed. The Cass Lake and Winnebagoish are suffering a good deal, while the condition of the Mille Lac and White Oak Point bands is shocking beyond description.

As has already been remarked, the condition of the several bands is much alike. It is well illustrated in the foregoing remarks concerning the Mille Lac and White Oak Point bands. They have not all reached their level of degradation, it is true, but there are conditions peculiar to each case, which makes it important that the same remedy should be applied to all.

The Lake Winnebagoish, Cass Lake, and Leech Lake Indians have but little land fit for cultivation. They have no gardens, if we except a few cultivated by the Leech Lake Indians, and their almost sole dependence has been the wild rice crop, and the small game, which is now fast disappearing.

The construction of dams and reservoirs at the headwaters of the Mississippi River, authorized by the act of June 14, 1880, and subsequent act of March 3, 1881, has in large measure destroyed their means of support, and if the Indians are not speedily removed they will soon be reduced to a state of pauperism and absolute dependence upon the charity of the Government.

Provision was made in said acts for the payment of damages sustained by all friendly Indians in the construction of said dams and reservoirs, but as yet no settlement has been made with those who suffered loss thereby, for the reason that the Indians have refused to accept the amount of money set apart for that purpose. For a history of this matter, see House Ex. Doc. No. 76, Forty-eighth Congress, first session.

Neither the Bois Forte band in the northern part of the State, nor the Indians of the Grand Portage Reservation, in the extreme eastern part, are making any progress.

Of the Bois Forte band, Inspector Thomas recently wrote: "Their condition is no better than it was twenty years ago. Should the Government withhold assistance from them, it would simply mean turning them out to die."

Whisky drinking is their great curse, as with the Mille Lac band, and there is but little hope for them where they are.

The Fond du Lac Indians are self-supporting and are reported to be making some progress. They have no agent with them, and until two years ago there had been no employé of the Government residing on the reservation for years. Their condition is better than that of any of the other bands, but I think it would be well to include them in the plan of consolidation. They are surrounded by the worst influences, and the most recent account we have of them describes them as "living a life of licentiousness and drunkenness." (Inspector Thomas, December 9, 1885.)

All of the Chippewa reservations in this State except Vermillion Lake are treaty reservations, and the removal and consolidation, if effected, must be done with the consent of the Indians and co-operation of Congress.

It has been estimated that there are over 200,000,000 feet of pine timber on the Mille Lac Reservation; on the Fond du Lac, 300,000,000; on Leech Lake, Cass Lake, Lake Winnebagoish and White Oak Point, 1,000,000,000 feet, having an aggregate value of from three to four million dollars.

The Grand Portage Reservation is rocky and barren, and of not much value, either for timber or agricultural purposes. Probably the Grand Portage and Bois Forte Reservations would not bring at public sale more than enough to pay the cost of removing the Indians to White Earth.

The area and population of the several reservations it is proposed to abandon and dispose of are as follows:

Reservation.	Popula- tion.	Area.	Reservation.	Popula- tion.	Area.
		<i>Acres.</i>			<i>Acres.</i>
Lake Winnebagoish (in- cluding Cass Lake and White Oak Point)	2,138	320,000	Fond du Lac	600	100,121
Leech Lake		94,440	Grand Portage	206	51,840
Mille Lac	942	61,014	Bois Forte (including Deer Creek and Vermilion Lake)	698	131,629

Beside the reservation Indians there are about 1,500 full-bloods and half-breeds scattered over the State, who ought to be gathered on the White Earth Reservation, at least the larger portion of them.

The White Earth Reservation, where it is proposed to consolidate and permanently settle the Chippewas, is said to be the garden spot of Minnesota. It has an area of 796,672 acres, or 1,245 square miles. The present population is 1,736. Nearly all of this land is susceptible of cultivation, is well watered and timbered, and every way capable of sustaining a large population.

If the consolidation could be effected, the sale of the abandoned reservations would enable the Department to settle all the Minnesota Chippewas (I do not include the Red Lake Indians) on good lands, and give them a fair start in the direction of self-support. A large surplus would be left for educational and other beneficent purposes; the cost of transportation would be greatly reduced, and, what is more than all, the Indians would be rescued from their present peril, and it might be reasonably expected that in time they would rise to the level of their brethren now occupying the White Earth, of whom Bishop Whipple recently wrote, "There is not in the State a more orderly Christian community than the Indians of the White Earth Reserve."

While it may not be desirable to remove any of the Red Lake and Pembina Chippewas from the Red Lake Reserve, I think it very desirable to include them in the negotiations.

They own and occupy an immense area of country north of White Earth, which has never been ceded to the United States; the Indians still retaining all their original rights in the soil. The reservation is estimated to contain about 3,200,000 acres or 5,000 square miles. Nearly one-half of this vast area is believed to be tillable land. It is occupied by less than 1,100 Indians. The timber on their reservation is of almost incalculable value, and if a portion of it only could be disposed of for the benefit of the Indians, it would make them rich. As it is, owing to the remoteness of the reservation from the agency, logging operations are being successfully carried on from both sides of the international line, and the northern portion of the reservation especially is being despoiled of much valuable timber without profit to the Indians or the Government. It is impossible to protect the timber from wholesale theft under the present system.

The Red Lake and Pembina bands, occupying this reservation, have much more land than they need, or can possibly make use of, and it is understood they are willing to sell a portion of it.

If it should be found that the White Earth Reservation is not large enough to accommodate all the Chippewas in Minnesota, and I think it somewhat doubtful, a portion of the Red Lake Reservation might be secured for that purpose, which is an additional reason for having the Indians of that reservation included in the negotiations. In my judgment, the best way to begin this movement is to send a commission to each of the several tribes and bands throughout the State, duly empowered to enter into negotiations with them, as was recently done in the case of the Sioux Indians in Dakota.

Bishop Whipple suggests that a delegation from each of the tribes be invited to visit Washington, but I am of opinion that more could be accomplished by sending a commission to them. I would select for that responsible duty men who are familiar with the history and surroundings of the Indians, and known to be interested in their welfare.

The work to be accomplished is of the utmost importance, involving not only the future well-being of eight or ten thousand Indians, but in no slight degree the material interests of the State in which they reside.

The most favorable conditions exist at White Earth, for testing the humane policy of the Government, and in my judgment there should be no delay in beginning the work.

In the case of some of the bands, the treaty provisions whereby they have hitherto, for many years, received material aid from the Government, have run out, and the gratuities now aggregate more than all that they derive through unexpired treaties.

The sale of the surplus reservations would create a fund which would relieve the Government of this burden, and put the Indians in a prosperous condition.

In view of the importance attaching to this work, the patient and laborious duties that will be required of the Commission, and the length of time likely to be involved in negotiating with the numerous bands throughout the State, and visiting the scattered communities of non-reservation Indians, where necessary, I think that not less than \$15,000 should be appropriated and made immediately available.

The expense of the Sioux Commission, to which reference has been made, was about \$13,000.

I have had prepared, and herewith transmit, a draft of an item intended for insertion in the Indian appropriation bill, and would respectfully recommend that it be transmitted to Congress with your favorable indorsement.

Bishop Whipple's letter is returned herewith, and two copies of this report are inclosed.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. D. C. ATKINS,

Commissioner.

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

To enable the Secretary of the Interior to negotiate with the several tribes and bands of Chippewa Indians, in the State of Minnesota, for such modification of existing treaties with said Indians as may be deemed desirable by said Indians and the Secretary of the Interior, fifteen thousand dollars, to be immediately available; but any agreement made shall not take effect until ratified by Congress.

FARIBAULT, MINN., *October 14, 1885.*

I respectfully suggest that you should call the chiefs of the Chippewas to Washington at as early a day as consistent.

(1) They have suffered very great wrongs by the building of dams on the Mississippi.

(2) They own large tracts of valuable pine land, which is year by year injured by fire.

(3) The Indian annuities have expired, or will soon.

(4) They have little or no funds for civilization.

(5) The Leech Lake, Cass Lake, Winnibagoshish, Oak Point, Sandy Lake, and Mille Lac Indians cannot be protected where they are or led to civilization.

(6) There is abundant land at White Earth of the best quality. The White Earth Indians will for a fair consideration give all that is needed for the other Chippewas.

(7) Great care must be taken to secure only those chiefs who can control their people and whose influence is on the side of civilization.

I do not believe that it is possible for a commission to make a treaty in the Indian country. It can be done at Washington.

I respectfully suggest that great care shall be taken to select proper representatives of the different bands, as well as the interpreters who are to accompany them. If you can do this, you will, I am sure, under God be the instrument of saving this poor race.

Assuring you of my high regard, yours, faithfully,

H. B. WHIPPLE,
Bishop of Minnesota.

MEMORANDUM.

(1) No almshouses for able-bodied men to graduate savage paupers.

(2) All funds except for aged, infirm, and sick, widows and children, to be expended as rewards for labor.

(3) Provision for schools in each settlement.

(4) Lands to be given on actual settlement in esheralty and inalienable.

(5) Provision for police administration of law.

(6) White Earth Reservation to be kept for their inheritance forever.

Hon. Mr. LAMAR,

Secretary of the Interior.