
CAMP NEAR GRAYSONVILLE,
San Joaquin River, February 17, 1851.

DEAR SIR: We had supposed that, through Colonel McKee, one of the commissioners, your department had been *officially* informed of the organization of our board, the election of a secretary, and of our proceedings since, up to a late date; but we have learned from him that the communications by him have been rather of a *private and individual character* than a formal report. We therefore hasten to lay before your department, briefly, our actings and doings, as well as such information as we have been enabled to gather, touching the mission with which we have been intrusted.

On the 13th January last, and within a few days after our arrival in the country, the three commissioners met in San Francisco, and proceeded at once to organize; after doing so, we elected Mr. John McKee, a very excellent and competent young gentleman, (and son of Colonel McKee, of the commission,) secretary for the board. We then visited San José, the seat of government, for the purpose of obtaining from the members of the legislature, then in session, such information as they might be able to impart, in relation to the Indians and the Indian difficulties in their respective districts. After paying our respects to his excellency Governor McDougal, and spending a few days at the capital, Dr. Wozencraft repaired to Benicia, for the purpose of calling upon General P. F. Smith, of the United States army, for the necessary escort of troops, &c.; the other two commissioners remaining in San José, with the view of prosecuting their inquiries more fully; and we flatter ourselves that the information we obtained has been, and will be, of infinite service to us in prosecuting the object of our mission.

We learned, among other things, that hostilities of a deadly character existed between the Indians and whites in different portions of the State, threatening, indeed, a general border war. From the southern part of the State, and particularly in the Mariposa country, murders by the

Indians were of almost daily occurrence, besides frequent depredations on the live stock and other property of the whites. On the Sacramento and Klamath rivers and their tributaries like depredations and murders were being committed, but not to so great an extent.

We determined to repair first to the southern districts, and with that view determined on leaving San José, with the intention of joining the escort, as soon as the troops were ready to march, at San Francisco; but on the day that Messrs. McKee and Barbour were to leave San José, Mr. John McKee (our secretary) was taken violently ill, and his father (Colonel McKee) was necessarily detained a few days on account of his extreme illness.

Dr. Wozencraft and Mr. Barbour in the mean time, having met at San Francisco, proceeded at once to prepare for the expedition, General Smith having readily agreed to furnish the required escort, &c. In a few days Colonel McKee joined them, and as soon as the troops could be got under marching orders, the commissioners, with an escort of one hundred men, under the immediate command of Captain E. D. Keys, started for the scene of the Indian troubles in the south.

On reaching Stockton it was deemed advisable that Dr. Wozencraft and Mr. Barbour should diverge from the line of march to this place, where the troops had to come for provisions, &c., and visit some tribes of friendly Indians on the Stanislaus and Tuolumne rivers, and again join the command at this place—Colonel McKee remaining with the command to superintend the baggage, &c.

Accordingly, on the 11th inst., Dr. Wozencraft and Mr. Barbour left Stockton, and after a travel of forty miles over the plains, at the foot of the hills of the Sierra Nevada, they reached Dent's ferry, on the Stanislaus river. They here found some three or four hundred Indians. On the morning of the 12th they had a talk with these Indians, (Judge Dent, one of the gentlemanly proprietors of the ferry, volunteering to act as interpreter.) They communicated to the Indians the object of their mission, their plans, &c. The Indians seemed highly pleased, and immediately runners were started out to bring in the principal chief and the captains of the tribe known as the Stanislaus or Kossus Indians. On the 14th, the chief Kossus and the greater number of his captains had assembled; a long talk was had, and it was finally agreed that, within four months, a final treaty should be entered into. This tribe numbers about four thousand persons, divided into some thirty bands, or *rancherius*, as they are called, extending from the Calaveras river on the north, to the Tuolumne river, on the south.

They are *generally* dirty, lazy, and ignorant, subsisting principally on acorns, which they pound into a fine meal or flour, using for that purpose a smooth stone for a pestle, and an excavation made in a large rock for a mortar: the flour is mixed with a little sugar when they can get it, and made into a mush or jelly called *penocha*, or *penona*. They are very fond of beef, hard bread, and fish: the latter they catch in large quantities at certain seasons of the year. They have no idea of a future state of rewards and punishments, but believe in the doctrine of transmigration, and imagine that when they die they are transferred to the grizzly bear, or *cogote*, (a species of the wolf.) They burn their dead, with all his or her personal effects: even the mule or horse of the

deceased is killed and burnt with its master. They are generally stout and robust, with mild countenances and good features, and are certainly susceptible of much moral and mental improvement.

On the evening of the 14th we left the Stanislaus river, and travelled south over plains to Horr's ferry, on Tuolumne river, (distant from Dent's about fifteen miles;) we there had an interview and *talk* with a friendly chief (Cornelius) and some of his captains, making the same arrangement with them for a final treaty.

It would perhaps be well to explain why we did not at once close a treaty with those tribes: the reason was, that we had but few goods for presents, and we wished to retain them for a treaty with the hostile tribes in whose vicinity we then were.

We succeeded in getting one of the captains (Cipriano,) with four of his men, to undertake to bring in the hostile chiefs from the headwaters of the Mariposa, Mercede, and Tuolumne rivers, which they promised to do, if possible, by the 24th instant: they are to meet us near Cornelius's rancheria, or settlement, on the Tuolumne river, about forty-five miles from its junction with the San Joaquin; but owing to the hostilities that have existed from time immemorial between the mountain (now the hostile) and valley Indians, we entertain strong doubts of their success in persuading the hostile chiefs to come in, and more particularly as the season is fast approaching when they can cross the Sierra Nevada, and thus bid defiance to any force that might be sent against them. We shall move our camp in a day or two, so as to be on the ground at the time agreed on, the distance from hence being about forty miles.

Should we succeed in effecting a treaty with the chiefs for whom we have sent, we hope soon to have quieted all difficulties in the southern part of the State by permanent treaties with all the southern tribes; but, on the contrary, should we fail in this, there will be no telling when we shall be able to treat with them. They are numerous and wild, inhabiting the mountain fastnesses that are almost inaccessible to the white man; they cannot be approached by a large body of men, and small parties are sure to fall a prey to their savage hostility.

Rumors are reaching us every day of fresh outbreaks and new outrages, some of them of the most cruel and revolting character. In many instances the whites have by their own bad conduct superinduced the difficulties; in others the Indians have perpetrated outrages of the most shocking character, from mere wantonness or to indulge their *natural propensity* to steal and plunder; men have been butchered by them in cold blood, and in one instance a white man was bound and *flayed alive*:

The consequence is, that the miners and citizens generally are in a high state of excitement, not knowing what will be the final result.

The governor has called out the militia in the Mariposa district, and kindly tendered to us any force we might desire; but we declined his offer, assuring him that General Smith had already furnished us with such escort as we required. In an interview with Colonel J. Neely Johnson, who has command of the State's troops, he promised us that he would hold his command in abeyance until we had made an effort to treat with the Indians. If we were unsuccessful, he would then make

war upon them, which must of necessity be one of extermination to many of the tribes.

We have many difficulties to encounter in the discharge of the high trust confided to us, not the least of which is the difficulty, or rather impossibility, of securing the services of *competent men* for the necessary duties pertaining to the mission at the prices to which we are restricted by instructions from the department; in fact, the common day-laborer is receiving better pay than we are as commissioners—to say nothing of the prices that we are authorized to pay assistants; and when we take into the estimate the high price that not only labor, but everything else, commands in this country, you will, we think, see at once the necessity for an increase not only in the pay allowed to interpreters, &c., but also to the commissioners themselves. The State is paying *our common soldiers* ten dollars per day and rations; and as we are desirous of executing our mission profitably to the government and creditable to ourselves, we hope you will pardon us, sir, for calling your attention to this subject.

There are other matters to which we beg leave to call your attention, and ask advice, in the first place, as regards the Indian title to lands in this country: whether we are to recognise even a possessory or usufructuary right in them or not, to any particular portion of the territory, before such lands as may be necessary for their subsistence shall have been set apart for their use? In the second place, whether or not we shall establish posts, with a small force, at suitable points, for the protection of both the white man and the Indian, and to secure a faithful compliance with the terms of such treaties as we may be able to make? And lastly, to what extent (if any) do our powers as *commissioners* authorize the appointing of suitable persons to trade with, superintend, and manage the various tribes, in our absence, with whom we may have made treaties? Something is absolutely necessary to be done besides merely treating with the Indians, in order to make available any treaty that may be made with them. They are scattered in small tribes over an extent of country four hundred miles in width, by about seven hundred in length, partly mountainous and partly valley; and what with their ignorance, degradation, and disposition to steal and murder, and the contempt of the white man for them, with a feeling too often to wrong and abuse them, that, without some one to constantly look after them, and to whom they in return could look for trade, instruction, and protection, treaties would be of little service, as they would be violated as often as made, and a continual warfare kept up until the Indians would be annihilated, at the sacrifice of many valuable lives and the loss of much property on the part of the whites.

In the exercise of our better judgments, with an eye to the interest of the government and the welfare of the Indians, we shall, under the instructions heretofore given us, and in compliance with the demands of humanity, as we conceive, act affirmatively on all those questions until otherwise directed.

With sentiments of high regard, we are, your obedient servants,

G. W. BARBOUR.

REDICK MCKEE.

O. M. WOZENCRAFT.

Hon. LUKE LEA, Esq.