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Adam Johnston to L. Lea, March 7 1851, in Report of the Secretary of  
the Interior, Sen. Exec. Docs., 33 Cong., Spec. Sess., Doc. 4, pp. 63-67 (688).

MARIPOSA, CALIFORNIA,

*March 7, 1851.*

SIR: Since my last communication to the department I have spent most of my time among the Indian tribes of the San Joaquin valley and those located on the tributaries of that river, along the western side of the Sierra Nevada.

On my return from a tour through the valley of the Sacramento I received information that the Indians of the San Joaquin valley were exhibiting feelings of discontent, and occasionally committing depredations on the persons and property of the whites. The mining region was threatened, and fears were entertained that serious consequences would ensue if something was not immediately done to quiet the Indians, and put a stop to their thefts, which were becoming daily more frequent and daring. I was solicited to go to that part of the country at the earliest possible day. It was thought that a few presents and fair promises might quiet them for a time—at least until I could communicate with the department and obtain instructions for future action. I was then without funds, but thought the circumstances would justify me in drawing for a small amount; and accordingly, on the 15th day of November, 1850, I negotiated a draft on the Department of the Interior for the sum of eight hundred dollars. A few days were occupied in selecting and purchasing proper articles for presents, and in making other necessary arrangements, previous to leaving for their location. On the 21st day of November I left San Francisco, intending to push as rapidly as possible to the camp of Mr. James D. Savage, situated in the mountains, on the headwaters of the Mariposa. Mr. Savage has been for some years with the Indians of California, speaks the languages of several tribes fluently, and possesses a powerful influence over them. I therefore viewed his camp as the most favorable location for effecting my purpose, and especially for obtaining facilities in opening a communication with the wild Indians of the mountains. Difficulty in obtaining transportation from Stockton to Mariposa delayed me in reaching his camp, until the first of December. Mr. Savage was then at another camp or trading-post, which he had recently established yet further in the mountains, on a river or stream called the Fresno. I remained at his camp on the Mariposa for a few days; but, as he did not return, I procured an Indian guide and proceeded to the Fresno, where I found him in the midst of numerous wild and rather war-like looking Indians. The Indians in that region are quite numerous and fine-looking, especially the "Chowchille" and "Chook-chaney" tribes. The most of them are wild, though they have among them many who have been educated at the missions, and who have fled from their real or supposed oppressors to the mountains. Those speak the Spanish language as well as their native tongue, and have intermarried with the wild tribes. Many of the tribes are, therefore, in a doubtful state—rather inclined towards barbarism, than to cherish such ideas of civilization as they may have acquired. This may be said of all the tribes inhabiting the western side of the Sierra Nevada, along the whole valley of the San Joaquin.

Mr. Savage has done much to open communication with the Indians of California, and to keep them on terms of friendship with the Americans. He had often told them, before I reached the Mariposa, of the Great Father at Washington; that he had sent a man to see them, who would talk with them and make them a few presents. They were therefore expecting me for some time before I reached them. On my arrival on the Fresno the Indians there seemed greatly gratified, and despatched couriers to other tribes announcing the fact that I had

reached them. I remained on the Fresno several days, during which time I had various interviews with the chiefs, braves, and men of authority among their respective tribes, the most powerful of which is the Chouchille. In an interview with the chief of that tribe on one occasion, he said to me, "This is our country; why do the Americans come here? They are good and brave, but they come upon the land of my people. What do they intend to do? I want to know, and must know, *right now.*" I was not exactly prepared for so imperious a demand, but made such explanations as seemed to satisfy his majesty. After some time he said, "Heretofore my people did not permit any stranger to pass over our country or stop in it, except Mr. Savage—he made us many presents;" and he added, "If you will make us presents, too, you may remain in our country *awhile.*" I endeavored to explain my mission; told him that the Great Father had sent me to talk with them, and to make them some presents as a token of his friendship and regard for them, but that they must not expect many presents at this time.

At the close of our *talk* the chiefs seemed fully satisfied, and assured me that their people should not steal or commit any depredations on the Americans. At the same time, they told me they could not control others. I set Christmas day as the time for a general meeting; and as my presents were limited, it was my intention to procure some beef cattle and make a feast for them.

I left the Fresno with the prospect of at least being able to arrest hostilities until the commissioners (of whose appointment I had then heard) should arrive. In the mean time I visited the rancheria, or villages, of other surrounding tribes. They all professed great friendship for the Americans, when at the same time they contemplated hostilities, as I had before been secretly informed. I of course conferred with them in such manner as seemed to me best calculated to arrest their designs. My efforts, however, were of no avail, as there was doubtless a general understanding among the various tribes that they should commence a predatory war, at an appointed time, all along the valley of the San Joaquin, if not along the entire base of the Sierra Nevada, from the northern to the southern boundary of the State. As an evidence of this, murders and robberies were committed simultaneously at various points.

The first serious depredations committed in this region were on the Fresno, and in the very camp which I had but a few days before left. On the 17th of December about five hundred Indians assembled at the camp on the Fresno, and murdered Mr. Savage's clerk and two other men—one alone escaping, through the efforts of the chief. I was then at the Mariposa. Soon after hearing of this outbreak we also discovered that all of the Indians in that vicinity had suddenly disappeared. Every day brought news of thefts and murders in various parts of the valley. This established beyond doubt the fact that a general hostility existed. I had obtained information that the Indians *declared open war* upon the whites, and every day's report confirmed the fact.

On the 20th day of December I left the Mariposa, with thirty-five men, to bury the murdered men on the Fresno, and, if possible, to punish the Indians. We expected to meet them there, not only in considerable numbers, but to some extent fortified. Our force being small, we thought it necessary to take them by surprise. In order to do so,

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we must travel all night, which we did, and reached the Fresno about daylight, but found no Indians there. The destruction of property, however, and the bodies of the dead before us, filled with arrows, presented a horrid scene. We immediately proceeded to inter the remains of the deceased. Our force being small, we concluded not to pursue the Indians further into the mountains, but to return that evening on our way back to the Mariposa. This determination was perhaps fortunate for us, as I have since learned the Indians were not far distant, knew of our arrival, and intended to attack us that night, had we remained upon the ground.

On reaching the Mariposa we learned that most of the Indians in the valley had hurriedly taken their women and children to the mountains. This is always looked upon as a sure indication of hostility.

Knowing the meagre force of United States troops here, and having no authority to call upon them, I immediately repaired to the seat of government to ask aid from the State.

My communication to the governor (a copy of which I herewith transmit) was laid before the legislature, and that body acted as promptly as possible in furnishing aid and protection to the mining region of this country. Two hundred volunteers, under authority of the State, are at this time encamped within a few miles of this place. They are ordered by the governor to await the arrival of the commissioners, who desire to make an effort for peace before opening the campaign. I have been in company with the commissioners for the last few days, during which time we met several of the more friendly Indians, of the few who yet remain in the valley. Some of them have been induced to go to the mountains for the purpose of inducing the wild tribes to meet the commissioners near this point. I fear, however, even if they can be induced to come in, which I doubt, no good can be accomplished with the hostile Indians until they are severely dealt with. In the first place, they are entirely ignorant as to the strength of the Americans. So rapidly have the whites emigrated into this country, that but few of the mountain Indians have any idea of their number. They see the miners among them, and believe the whites have moved their camps from their old camping grounds upon their own. Others, who know something of the numbers in various towns and cities here, look upon San Francisco, Sacramento, and the United States, as about the same size. The commissioners entertained some hopes of effecting a peace, but I am satisfied that nothing can be done, for some time to come, with many of the mountain tribes. They are now in the valleys and cañons of the mountains, living on animals and provisions plundered from the whites, and if not subdued before the snows leave the Sierra Nevada, they will doubtless give the government much trouble, and in all probability a protracted war.

Again: if a treaty could be effected, my opinion is, it will not be respected by either Indians or Americans. The Indians are notoriously treacherous and thievish, and doubtless will continue their depredations. On the other hand, many of the whites in this region have lost either property or friends by the Indians, and openly declare they will shoot down any and all Indians they meet with, whether a treaty be made or not.

There is one way, and one alone, by which peace can be maintained between the whites and the Indians here; and that is, by establishing a line of small fortifications along the valley of the San Joaquin. Let the Indian agent of such district reside at a post of this kind, and punish the white man who murders an Indian, as promptly as an Indian who would commit the same crime. In my opinion, about five posts of this kind, with from ten to twenty soldiers and a few extra stands of arms, would be sufficient to maintain order and peace throughout this border. Some such regulation, under the present state of society here, is, in my opinion, indispensable.

I have obtained some of the Indian languages of the San Joaquin valley, and other matters of interest, which I will transmit with the present mail.

I have the honor to remain, your most obedient servant, &c.,  
ADAM JOHNSTON.

HON. L. LEA,

*Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington City.*