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The Sioux Treaties and the Traders

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A HUNDRED YEARS AGO this summer, in June, 1851, Governor Ramsey and Luke Lea, commissioner of Indian affairs, went to Traverse des Sioux and Mendota to treat with the Sioux for their wide and beautiful lands west of the Mississippi. The people of Minnesota had waited long for treaties that would open to settlement the Suland, almost twenty-four million acres in Minnesota, Iowa, and what is now South Dakota. Minnesota Territory, young though it was, had already outgrown the narrow limits of the area opened for settlement by the Indian land cession of 1837. This triangle, lying between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers, could not hold within its borders the restless population of 1851, to say nothing of the plans of boosters already talking of statehood.

Of the many Minnesotans who wanted the treaties, none were more eager than the fur traders. Season after season and decade after decade these businessmen of the plains and forests had advanced supplies for the hunt to the red men. The Indians rarely gathered enough furs to pay off their obligations, and by 1851 the traders had on their books debts amounting to almost half a million dollars. The fur trade was declining, and, without other means of getting their money, the traders looked to the funds the Indians would receive for their lands after signing the treaties. When the call for the treaty went out, traders flocked from posts near and far to Traverse des Sioux and Mendota to push the negotiations.

To produce the harmony necessary for signing among members of the motley crowds that gathered for the treaties required the skill of a master strategist. No man in the country was better equipped for such a role than Henry Hastings Sibley. Agent and partner of the old American Fur Company at Mendota as early as 1834 and delegate in Congress since

1848, he understood every step that must be traveled from the inauguration of a move for the treaties to their ratification by the Senate. He knew his power over the red men, and wrote confidently to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company, successors of the American Fur Company with headquarters in St. Louis: "The Indians are all prepared to make a treaty when we tell them to do so, and such an one as I may dictate. . . . I think I may safely promise you that no treaty can be made without our claims being first secured."¹

The Indians, some eight thousand members of various Sioux tribes, had to be watched and guided if the treaties were to be made. Traders who had lived among them for years and knew their nature well realized the Indians wanted a treaty that would bring them the better things of life as they knew it. Susceptible to varying influences, however, the red men veered from one course to another as representatives of different interests spoke to them persuasively.

Through anxious months the traders worked, attempting to persuade the Indians to acknowledge their indebtedness and to promise to pay their debts after receiving money for their lands. As early as June, 1850, Sibley had alerted the traders associated with him to prepare for the struggle. "There should be a concert of action among all of us," he wrote to Martin McLeod, "so that our just claims may be provided for. I fear there will be trouble with some of the bands, but by judicious management their consent will doubtless be obtained to pay 'their just engagements.'"²

Up and down the Minnesota River, talk of the treaty was soon on everyone's lips. Following the trail of every rumor, the Indians trooped into the trading posts, seeking news of the treaties instead of hunting. At this critical time, the traders were determined to keep the confidence of the Indians, but they were embarrassed by continual postponing of the treaty date. McLeod at Lac qui Parle was harassed by swarms of idle Indians, bickering among themselves, and belaboring him with insinuations about the delay. He felt their confidence slipping away and warned Sibley of the consequences: "The Indians have been so long anxiously awaiting for some definite [*sic*] news without getting any, through their traders, the only source which they *yet* depend upon, that they are, I now assure you dissatisfied with us all, and begin to think the whole talk of a treaty a humbug."³ Reports of clashes between Indians and

¹ Sibley to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company, November 3, 1850, Sibley Letter Books, Sibley Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

² Sibley to McLeod, June 23, 1850, McLeod Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

³ McLeod to Sibley, October 6, 1850, Sibley Papers.



TRADER'S CABIN AT TRAVERSE DES SIOUX

[The illustrations with this article are from Frank B. Mayer's Sketchbooks, Newberry Library, Chicago.]

whites and statements by the chiefs on debts were minutely chronicled by the traders in their anxiety for the success of their claims.

The Indians' debts were large, but astute traders knew there was a limit to what the natives would pay. Although the creditors felt their claims were just, they realized that collection could not be in full and could be achieved only by diplomacy. Since the Indians seemed to favor paying the claims of the men who lived among them, the traders felt their debtors should not be pushed to acknowledge old claims. An insistence upon exacting the last cent would, according to McLeod, "defeat our own hopes or prevent the effecting of a Treaty, a result not to be thought of for a moment."⁴ He felt that for the sake of salvaging something, all the traders must sacrifice a little, and some of them must sacrifice much.

With men like McLeod watching Minnesota, Sibley labored in Washington. Much of the success of the treaties depended on the commissioners chosen to execute them. From the beginning, no one doubted that Alexander Ramsey would and should be one of them. As governor of Minnesota, he knew the needs of its people; and as *ex officio* superintendent of Indian affairs for Minnesota, he understood the needs of the Indians. If the treaty were to provide for a fair exchange of land for benefits, surely Ramsey was in a position to balance the scales of justice. He was duly appointed, and he went to the treaty grounds with the approbation of government, traders, and Indians.

The choice of a second commissioner was not so easy. Although the monetary return was slight, the position was highly prized for the influence it would carry in the negotiations. Sibley and his supporters advanced the cause of Hugh Tyler and others, while G. W. and W. G. Ewing of Fort Wayne, Indiana, business rivals of the American Fur Company, worked for the appointment of Richard W. Thompson, their claim agent. Minnesotans hurried to Washington to support the campaigns of men acceptable to them, while Sibley worked incessantly to "clog the wheels" of Thompson, who was "moving heaven & earth to succeed in his object." By November, 1850, Sibley's battle seemed to have been lost, and letters from Washington carried to Minnesota the somber news that Thompson would join Ramsey as commissioner. Thompson, too, thought the position was his, and he wrote to Ramsey for an exchange of opinions on supplies and patronage.⁵

But Sibley and his associates did not accept defeat. While they tacked

⁴ McLeod to Sibley, September 16, 1850, Sibley Papers.

⁵ Sibley to Ramsey, September 19, 1850, R. W. Thompson to Ramsey, February 7, 1851, Ramsey Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society; Dr. Thomas Foster to Sibley, December 3, 1850, Sibley Papers.

to the wind by mending matters with Thompson, they still tried to secure the appointment of one of their men. Sibley was advised not "to meddle *against* Thompson any more, but to make a *virtue* of necessity an[d] conciliate." Living in the same boardinghouse with Lea, newly appointed commissioner of Indian affairs, Sibley had an opportunity to stress the commercial connection of Thompson with the Ewings, while urging Lea to neutralize Thompson's influence by coming in as a third commissioner. In the hope that Thompson would be edged out, Sibley was able to delay the issuing of official appointments and the framing of instructions. The contest was resolved when the Indian appropriation bill approved on February 27, 1851, provided that all commissioners appointed to make treaties with the Indians should be selected from among the officers and agents of the Indian office. Under this proviso, Luke Lea was appointed to act with Ramsey in making the Minnesota treaties.⁶

With the naming of Lea as commissioner, another obstacle had been removed from the path of Sibley and his associates. But there was still the important matter of the instructions to be issued to the commissioners by the secretary of the interior. Sibley, despite his close personal and political relations with Ramsey, feared the instructions would hamper the traders in collecting their debts from the Indians. In February, 1851, Sibley wrote Ramsey that he did not like the latter's suggestion to Lea that he "restrict the Comm^{rs} on the subject of debts in making the treaties" for fear "the traders who control the Indians will 'exact the last penny.'" Such advice, coming from Ramsey, was considered by Sibley as a personal affront, and he predicted that it would result in the failure of any attempt to treat. Sibley reminded Ramsey that he was not asking for government aid in collecting the traders' debts, but he did want the question left open.⁷

The instructions were not framed until after Ramsey went to Washington in April to talk to Lea. During the first two weeks of May, Ramsey himself wrote the draft of the instructions, which did not mention the traders' debts and provided for wide discretionary powers. They were issued to Ramsey and Lea by the secretary of the interior on May 16.⁸

Traverse des Sioux was the site chosen for the meeting with the Sisseton and Wahpeton tribes of the southwestern Minnesota and eastern Dakota plains. The commissioners and their party left Fort Snelling on

⁶ Foster to Sibley, December 3, 1850, Sibley Papers; Sibley to Ramsey, December 4, 5, 1850, January 23, February 20, 1851, Ramsey Papers.

⁷ Sibley to Ramsey, February 9, 1851, Ramsey Papers.

⁸ Ramsey Diary, April 26, May 4, 8, 14, 16, 1851; A. H. H. Stuart to Lea and Ramsey, May 16, 1851, Ramsey Papers. The Minnesota Historical Society has a copy of the Ramsey Diary for 1851.



CAMPING AT TRAVERSE DES SIOUX

June 29 aboard the "Excelsior" for the seventy-five mile trip up the swollen Minnesota. The passengers who boarded the steamboat were a heterogeneous lot. Among them, in addition to Ramsey, Lea, and Sibley, were Frank B. Mayer, a young artist from Baltimore, who recorded the scenes and men at Traverse des Sioux with pen and pencil; Dr. Thomas Foster, secretary to the commissioners; Mr. and Mrs. Richard Chute of Fort Wayne, Indiana; Tyler, once an aspirant for the position of commissioner; and James M. Goodhue of St. Paul, editor of the *Minnesota Pioneer*.

When the steamboat tied up at the landing on June 30, the decks were alive with activity. On the hurricane deck, visiting Indians of the Kaposia band "attired themselves in full costume with eagle plumes & turkey-beards [,] deer tails & horse tails" and sang a greeting to their kinsmen on shore. Cattle, baggage, provisions, arms, and passengers poured off the boat onto the landing. After an ox was butchered to provide a feast for the Indians, who had grown hungry waiting, the treaty party pitched tents on a height overlooking the river, the trading post, the mission houses, and the surrounding prairie.⁹

Many of the Indians of the upper Sioux bands who were to treat at Traverse des Sioux were not on hand to meet the party that debarked from the "Excelsior." While waiting for them to arrive, the visitors reinforced their tents against the drizzling rain, prepared eating quarters in an old log building, and inspected the old trading post. They became acquainted with the missionaries, Robert Hopkins and Alexander Huggins, who lived in the mission houses on the river bank. Since Hopkins had been at the mission since 1843 and Huggins since 1846, they had much to tell the strangers about the country and its people. They looked at the ruins of the trading post established about 1812 by Louis Provençalle and at the newer buildings where the fur business was then being conducted. In an Indian lodge they saw and admired Nancy McClure, beautiful daughter of Lieutenant James McClure and a Sisseton woman.

The spectacle of Indian camp life, with its noise, songs, cooking, smoke, smells, dances, and games was a source of endless entertainment to the visitors. On the afternoon of their arrival, they watched some women play a game of la crosse, described by Mayer as "one of the most exciting & picturesque sights which can be witnessed." Goodhue was not so enthusiastic about "these wild red women, with their dirty ears, greasy

⁹ Bertha L. Heilbron, ed., *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier in 1851: The Diary and Sketches of Frank Blackwell Mayer*, 145-149, (St. Paul, 1932); William G. LeDuc, *Minnesota Year Book for 1852*, 24-25, (St. Paul).

dresses and lousy heads." Although the editor could not imagine any white man wanting to make an alliance with one of them, he saw at Traverse des Sioux many who had taken Indian wives. "At one of the wigwams," he wrote, "we saw a Frenchman with an Indian wife and half-breed children, looking on with Indian stoicism and placidity, while his dusky bride was frying the entrails of a beef, (which in justice to her character as a cook, requires us to say were rinsed)." ¹⁰

The population of Traverse des Sioux grew so rapidly in the first weeks of July that Goodhue thought an addition or two had better be laid out. Hercules L. Dousman, McLeod, and Joseph R. Brown arrived for the Fourth of July. Instead of celebrating as they had planned, the campers went into mourning for Hopkins, who drowned in the river while bathing on the morning of the Fourth. When the body was recovered three days later, "it was followed by a long line of silent spectators, Indians, French & Americans." ¹¹

Bands of Sisseton and Wahpeton were still streaming into the rendezvous from their hunting grounds on the far-off plains and on the Minnesota. The wild pageantry of their costumes, dancing, and songs made an occasion of each group's arrival. Goodhue described one company of Sissetons, "mounted on their horses, and advancing with the noise of two drums, and singing of the wildest war song that ever sent the blood curdling over the scalp, marching in line; now they proceed to the marquee of the Commissioners, to present themselves and to report their arrival and their miserable starving condition. After due ceremonies of introduction, they danced a begging dance, received presents of blankets, tobacco, &c., and retired." ¹²

The high point in the festivities was the wedding of Nancy McClure and David Faribault on July 11. In the commissioners' marquee, half-breeds, Indians, and whites assembled to hear the Episcopal service read by Alexis Bailly, justice of the peace. Mayer wrote in his diary that "the marriage was announce[d] by a salute of champagne [*sic*] corks, the report of which soon summoned the camp to hilarious harmony, which flowed on thro' a hearty dinner & the subsequent toasts & broke like the surf as the company dispersed singing simultaneously by individual & collective efforts 'Sparkling & bright,' 'Auld lang syne,' 'Vive le Compagnie.'" ¹³

But all was not feasting and games at Traverse des Sioux. Men were at

¹⁰ Heilbron, ed., *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier*, 150; LeDuc, *Year Book*, 26.

¹¹ Heilbron, ed., *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier*, 165.

¹² LeDuc, *Year Book*, 30.

¹³ Heilbron, ed., *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier*, 171.



NANCY McCLURE'S WEDDING

work forwarding their plans. The traders, who had waited long for this day of reckoning, did everything they could to keep the Indians under control. Sibley, on whose energy and influence all depended, was tireless in his efforts to keep the many factions in balance. The commissioners were growing impatient with the delays, the claimants were numerous, the Indians were grumbling; and still many important Indian leaders were absent. On a flying visit to Mendota on July 11, Sibley wrote the Chouteaus that although he was doing all in his power to hold the Indians in line, "everything thus far is enveloped in mist and doubt."¹⁴

On the sidelines stood the representatives of a claim not so strongly represented as those pushed by Sibley. Richard Chute had not traveled all the way from Indiana to amuse his lovely wife with the sights of the Minnesota frontier. He represented the Ewings, who had traded with the Sioux at Good Road's village on the Minnesota and who also had claims to present. Chute knew that he and David Olmsted, another Ewing man, were not in a favorable position. Without Thompson as a treaty commissioner, their influence was slight. When Chute arrived in St. Paul, he observed that Sibley had "his stakes pretty well set," but he watched for an opportunity to get "a lick at the platter." He feigned nonchalance over Thompson's failure to get the appointment as commissioner, and he let it be known that all Thompson really wanted was a good buffalo hunt. "Lea, Ramsey & Sibley are now as thick as three in a bed," he wrote the Ewings, "but I¹¹ bet my ribs . . . it wont last." He felt they surely must clash, and when they did he was ready with his account books to do business for the Ewings.¹⁵

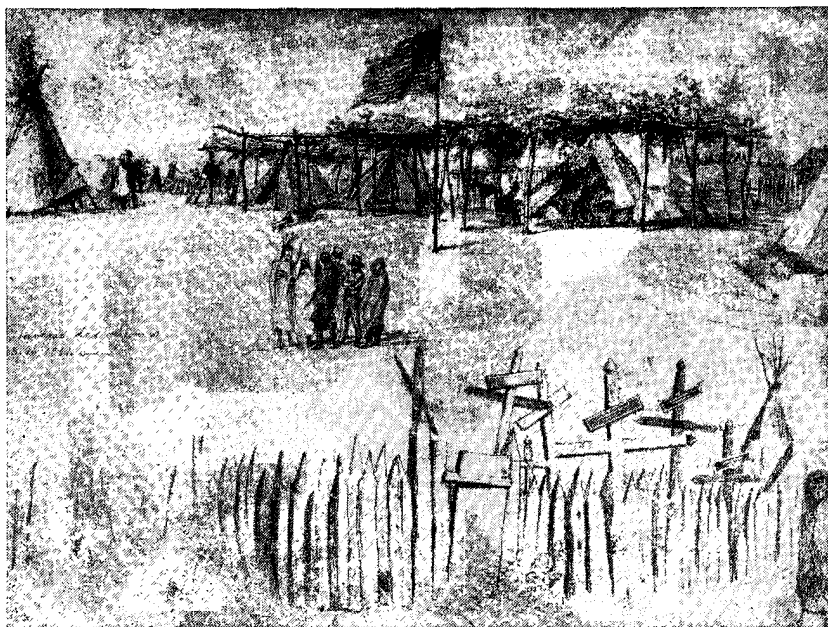
At long last, on July 18, all the tribesmen had assembled. The treaty negotiations opened with a grand council in the shelter of an arbor made of green boughs. The commissioners sat behind a table on a raised platform, while the chiefs were seated in front of the commissioners on benches arranged in a semicircle. Inside and outside the arbor, crowds of traders, reporters, interpreters, and Indians followed the course of the council. Alexis Bailly lighted the pipe that was passed around among the chiefs and the commissioners. And thirsty Indians dipped gourds into the barrel of sugar water provided for their refreshment.¹⁶

Lea and Ramsey explained the treaty to the Indians, then asked that they discuss the terms among themselves the next day. In council on the nineteenth, some of the chiefs raised objections to the treaty, and Sleepy

¹⁴ Sibley Letter Books.

¹⁵ Chute to G. W. Ewing, June 24, 27, 1851, Ewing Papers, Indiana State Library. The Minnesota Historical Society has microfilm copies of these and other pertinent Ewing letters.

¹⁶ Heilbron, ed., *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier*, 199.



TREATY GROUND WITH ARBOR AT TRAVERSE DES SIOUX

[In the foreground is an Indian graveyard.]

Eyes, a Sisseton chief, left the council with some of his young men. The commissioners countered by ordering that rations be stopped, the flag struck, and a boat made ready for departure. These preparations and the work of the traders changed the disposition of the Indians, and in the evening they asked that the negotiations be renewed on the twenty-first. On July 23, thirty-five chiefs of the Wahpeton and Sisseton Sioux came forward to touch the pen of the secretary, an act by which they ceded their lands to the United States for \$1,665,000. Of this sum, \$1,360,000 would be kept in trust to draw an annual interest of five per cent to be paid to members of the tribes, and \$275,000 was to be paid directly to the chiefs.¹⁷

It was the latter sum, designated to take care of the red men's just engagements, that the traders planned to have in payments for the Indians' debts. Immediately after signing the treaty, the Indians signed another instrument which would transfer the money to their creditors.

¹⁷ For the treaty, see Charles J. Kappler, comp., *Indian Laws and Treaties*, 2:588-590 (Washington, 1904). Detailed accounts of the negotiations and the signing of the treaty are given in William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:279-282 (St. Paul, 1921), and in Ruth Thompson, "The Sioux Treaties of 1851." The latter is a master's thesis prepared at the University of Minnesota in 1912. The Minnesota Historical Society has a copy.

Since the traders' claims far exceeded the amount of money available, a committee of three scaled down the claims and assigned to each trader his share of the money. The list of traders, with the amount due each, was attached to the agreement after the Indians had signed it.

The Ewing interests did not receive even a hearing before the traders' committee. Chute was placed in an awkward position when he was represented to the commissioners as a spy sent out by the Ewings to upset the treaty arrangements in vengeance for Thompson's defeat. "Knowing how important it was to be friendly with the Comm^{rs} I acted very circumspectly & laid low, giving them no clue on me or my claim," he wrote to his employers after the treaty was signed. He was successful in concealing his mission, but silence brought him no profit. Chute had wanted to represent both the claims of the Ewings and of other independent traders, but he found that all except Kenneth McKenzie and Louis Robert were "pinned on Sibley." He left Traverse des Sioux with only one bit of consolation. Since the Sioux agent, Nathaniel McLean, could not certify that the paper had been explained to the Indians before they signed it, Chute thought something could be done to break the agreement. He wrote the Ewings that perhaps "we can get one shoulder under the arrangement & give it an Irish hoist."¹⁸

The business at Traverse des Sioux was finished, and on July 24 the treaty party crowded onto a keelboat bound downstream for Mendota. There was jubilation in the air. The commissioners had successfully executed the treaty, the traders would get their money, and, on shore, the Indians were already feasting on government cattle left behind. Voyageurs, traders, and half-breeds joined in the songs that made the trip merry. The keelboat was escorted by three canoes filled with Indians, who added to the clamor by yelling and singing their wild war songs. In twenty-three hours, the heavily laden boat reached Mendota, where members of the Wahpekute and Mdewakanton bands, the woodland and Mississippi Sioux, were already gathering for their treaty.¹⁹

The council opened in the Chouteaus' warehouse at Mendota on July 29. After one session in the hot, crowded room, the group moved onto the high plain overlooking the landing, where a large arbor had been constructed. Stormy sessions between commissioners and Indians followed. The Indians wanted to talk of many things, among them a sum of \$30,000 that had accumulated in the education fund set up by the treaty of 1837. Like the Sisseton and Wahpeton, they wanted to change

¹⁸ Chute to W. G. Ewing, July 26, 1851; to W. G. and G. W. Ewing, July 30, 1851, Ewing Papers.

¹⁹ Ramsey Diary, July 24, 25, 1851; LeDuc, *Year Book*, 68-69; Heilbron, ed., "Frank B. Mayer and the Treaties of 1851," in *Minnesota History*, 22:145 (June, 1941).

the boundaries of the reservation assigned to them on the Minnesota River. The interminable conferences were brought to a sharp conclusion by the commissioners on August 5. Sixty-three chiefs of the lower bands signed a treaty almost identical with that signed by the upper bands at Traverse des Sioux.²⁰

Offstage things were not going so well. The Indians' signatures on the traders' papers had been secured by vigilance and hard work at Traverse des Sioux. At Mendota, the plans miscarried. After the treaty was signed, the chiefs assembled and agreed to pay \$90,000 on their debts. But the traders were not satisfied with the allotment, and they pressed the Indians for a more generous arrangement. Influenced by members of the upper bands, who went to Mendota to protest against the traders' paper they had signed earlier at Traverse des Sioux, the chiefs refused to put their names on the paper. The traders knew that the Indians had been "meddled with," but they did not know what to do about it. When the Indians dispersed for their hunts, fair words about the payment of debts would be forgotten. Yet, if the traders pressed the Indians for a paper, the clamor of monopoly already heard on every side would only defeat the ratification of the treaties. To bring the Indians into a more favorable frame of mind, the traders cut off credits. But the red man's hand was strengthened by opposition traders, who furnished the hunters with goods and urged them to hold out. At length, on October 15, the Wahpekute signed the paper. But the Mdewakanton still refused.²¹

And then began a paper war that must have bewildered the unlettered Indians. The Wahpekute had signed late and with reluctance; the Mdewakanton had not signed at all; and the upper bands who had signed at Traverse des Sioux were protesting that their paper was a fraud. Clearly someone had been at work among them. Sibley suspected a number of people, among them Henry M. Rice, the Ewings, their agents Chute and Olmsted, and Madison Sweetser, a brother-in-law of the Ewings newly arrived from Indiana. His was a name that Minnesotans would remember in the next two years. To many it became synonymous with mischief, for he almost succeeded in wrecking the plans so carefully made by Sibley and his friends.

When Sweetser arrived in Minnesota in September, 1851, he was introduced to Governor Ramsey in a letter from W. G. Ewing as a merchant who had been drawn to Minnesota by the flattering reports of Lea

²⁰ Thompson, "Sioux Treaties of 1851"; LeDuc, *Year Book*, 74-87; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:284-287; Kappler, comp., *Indian Laws and Treaties*, 2:591-593.

²¹ Chute to G. W. and W. G. Ewing, August 8, 1851; Sibley to Dousman, August 17, October 16, 1851; to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company, November 1, 1851, Sibley Letter Books.

and others. At no time did the Ewings reveal that Sweetser was working for them. When the fight grew warm, they even promised that they would try to subdue Sweetser through their kinship with him. Sweetser's reports to the Ewings, however, were explicit. Cautious with those who asked him about his business, he did everything he could to throw them off the track. He planned to get into the Indian country as fast as he could, woo the Indians with presents and promises, and extract from them a document that would nullify the traders' paper. His intention was succinctly phrased in a letter to the Ewings: "if I ever get into the country [*sic*] be as[s]ured I will knock Mr. Sibleys 2 hundred thousand arrangement so high he will not get a glimpse of it untill his congressional term expires."²²

By November, 1851, Sweetser, equipped with a license to trade, was dealing out presents to the Indians from an establishment at Traverse des Sioux. His arrival at the Traverse unleashed a flurry of fence building. The enemy had invaded, and he must be pushed off the pre-emption claims of traders associated with Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company. Sibley obtained an order from the Indian agent instructing Sweetser to move out, but nothing could be secure until the claims were enclosed by fences and the buildings required by the pre-emption law were erected in the enclosure.²³

Sweetser, meanwhile, sent out runners to the Indians calling them to a gathering at the Traverse. Although he told the Indians he had presents for them, his real purpose was to get from them a power of attorney that would nullify the traders' paper. Fully aware of this, the traders alerted their men throughout the Indian country to prevent the Indians from going to Sweetser. But the upper Indians did send a delegation, and before its members left the Traverse they signed a revocation of the traders' paper and made Sweetser their attorney.²⁴

Sweetser carried the Indians' protest to their agent, to Governor Ramsey, and to the commissioner of Indian affairs in Washington. Although the traders were not in agreement about what should be done, many thought the best way to stop the uproar was to make a deal with Sweetser. The publicity attending an accusation of fraud, even if it were proved ungrounded, would provide arguments for Senators who wanted to defeat the ratification of the treaties. No strings in the tangled skein were

²² W. G. Ewing to Ramsey, September 27, 1851, Ramsey Papers; Madison Sweetser to W. G. Ewing, October 26, 1851; to G. W. Ewing, October 26, 1851, Ewing Papers; F. B. Sibley to McLeod, April 21, 1852, Sibley Letter Books.

²³ F. B. Sibley to Duncan Kennedy, November 26, 1851, Sibley Letter Books.

²⁴ F. B. Sibley to McLeod, November 24, 1851; to James Wells, December 11, 1851, Sibley Letter Books.

overlooked. Sibley called on the Chouteaus to exert pressure on the Ewings; Dousman was asked to prevent Rice from acting with Sweetser; the traders in the Minnesota country tried to keep the half-breeds from deserting the cause; and a proposal was made to settle with Sweetser. Sweetser offered to settle for \$30,000, but the traders thought this a rather high price to pay for the right to collect their debts.²⁵

Out of the smoke of battle, a new alliance emerged. The designs of Sweetser were defeated by the concerted action of Rice, Sibley, and Ramsey. Rice undertook to obtain from the Indians a revocation of the powers granted to Sweetser, as well as approval of the treaty amendments made by the Senate. He succeeded in both enterprises, and before the end of 1852 Sweetser was effectively blocked. When the Indians gave Ramsey power to pay out the money owed the traders and the traders authorized Sibley and Tyler to receive the money from Ramsey, the transaction was complete. Sweetser had one more inning in 1852. At Traverse des Sioux, where Ramsey had gone to obtain a witnessed receipt from the Indians, members of the upper bands, incited by Sweetser, raised further objections. When this insurrection was put down and the treaties were ratified by the Senate, Ramsey believed he was done with the business at last.²⁶

But Governor Ramsey still had another ordeal before him. From the beginning representatives of the Ewings had been convinced that Ramsey was managing the treaties for the group of traders led by Sibley. None of his accusers presented concrete evidence of an arrangement with Sibley, but they found many who would listen to their accusations. "I find that Ramsey men are all without exception Sibley men," Sweetser wrote to one Ewing brother; and, to another, "Gov. Ramsey and Sibley have a community of interest in this claim arrangement." The charges of fraud led to a Senate investigation, with seven charges and specifications against Ramsey. Chief among them was the allegation that Ramsey had used the money paid into his hands exclusively for the claims of the Sibley group. The investigation committee went to St. Paul, heard the evidence, and cleared Ramsey of the charges.²⁷

Those who had been instrumental in pushing the treaty through had cause to remember it. For months and even years, Indians and half-breeds badgered them to make good the promises made in the heat of the

²⁵ Dousman to Sibley, December 24, 1852, Sibley Papers; Sibley to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company, November 1, 1851, Sibley Letter Books.

²⁶ Ramsey to Lea, March 2, 1853, Ramsey Papers; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:293-304.

²⁷ Sweetser to G. W. Ewing, October 29, 1851; to W. G. Ewing, October 29, 1851, Ewing Papers. For the full report of the investigation, see 33 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 61 (serial 699).

struggle. In a moment of irritation, Dousman predicted that "the Sioux treaty will hang like a curse over our heads for the rest of our lives."²⁸

Others living in the territory, however, soon forgot the bitterness of the struggle, as waves of enthusiasm swept over the country with news that the Suland was open. The Suland was theirs, and settlers, townsite promoters, and traders rushed in to make claims even before the land was declared open to settlement. In a contagion of townsite fever, speculators plastered the banks of the Minnesota with paper towns. Traverse des Sioux was booming by 1853, and other names, longer remembered, showed up on the maps that advertised Minnesota to the world. Minnesota Territory, the boosters agreed, would soon be knocking at the gates, asking Congress for admission as a state.

²⁸ F. B. Sibley to Dousman, July 5, 1853, Sibley Letter Books.



In a version of Frank B. Mayer's diary owned by the American Museum of Natural History of New York and now on loan with the Minnesota Historical Society, the artist who witnessed the signing of the treaty of Traverse des Sioux on July 23, 1851, describes the event as follows:

"July 23. *The Treaty Signed.* This event was conducted with much dignity both on the part of the Indians and the commissioners. The commissioners having first signed the treaty, the chiefs stepped forward in rotation, and touched the pen which the secretary used to indite their names. This being their form of oath and acquiescence. Some few, who had been instructed by the missionaries, wrote their names and many prefaced their signature with a short speech. . . .

"As each chief signed the treaty, a medal, bearing the head of the president of the U.S., was placed around his neck by the commissioner and when all had signed, the commissioner addressed them in a valedictory of some length, and in the course of the afternoon a large amount of presents were distributed to them, consisting of blankets, cloth, powder, lead, tobacco, vermilion, beads, looking glasses, knives, trinkets &c."

William G. Le Duc, in his *Minnesota Year Book for 1852*, concludes his report of the day's events by remarking: "Thus ended the sale of twenty-one millions of acres of the finest land in the world. The Indians are now busy in receiving the goods, and the dinnerless whites, now that the excitement is over, are anxiously inquiring for provender. To-morrow morning we strike tents and start our flat-boat and canoes down the river."



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