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Article Summary: In 1824 Peter Wilson assumed his post as sub-agent for the upper Missouri. He was to lay the ground work for an expedition the following summer among the tribes of that region and to keep the Missouri River Sioux friendly to the United States. The article includes both official and personal letters from Wilson.

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Photographs / Images: tents of the Poncas on the Bank of the Missouri (based on Charles Bodmer painting)

THE LETTERS OF PETER WILSON, FIRST RESIDENT AGENT AMONG THE TETON SIOUX

EDITED BY HARRY H. ANDERSON

IN 1806, while on the return leg of their epic journey to the Pacific coast, Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark formulated a program intended to secure the friendship and allegiance of the Teton Sioux for the United States government. From their experiences with these Indians while ascending the Missouri River in 1804, Lewis and Clark recognized the Tetons as holding a key to American expansion and control of the upper Missouri fur trade. The establishment of a government trading house and agent's residence in the center of Sioux country, at the mouth of the Cheyenne River, was to be the cornerstone of this new Sioux policy.¹ For a variety of reasons, the Lewis and Clark plan was never put into operation. It was not

¹ For details on the Lewis and Clark plan and the methods by which they intended to put it into operation, see Harry H. Anderson, "Lewis and Clark, Heney and the Pony Herd," *Wi-iyohi, Monthly Bulletin of the South Dakota Historical Society*, XIII (July, 1959).

Harry H. Anderson, who will be remembered as a contributor of other articles on Indian subjects to this magazine, is Assistant Secretary of the South Dakota Historical Society.

until October, 1824, that Peter Wilson, ex-Lieutenant of Artillery in the United States Army, assumed his post as sub-agent for the upper Missouri and became the first resident agent for the Teton and other western Sioux tribes.²

The purpose behind Wilson's assignment was two-fold. In a general way he was to lay the ground work for the expedition under General Henry Atkinson and Benjamin O'Fallon which was to go among the upper Missouri tribes during the summer of 1825. Wilson was instructed to send runners to the various chiefs, informing them that the Great Father in Washington was sending two of his representatives to them to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the whites and his Indian children. In 1824, officials in Washington were deeply concerned over the condition of Indian affairs west of the Mississippi River. Primarily this concern was motivated by a desire to protect the American fur trade against threatened encroachments, real and imaginary, by British interests from Canada. On May 24, 1824, Congress enacted legislation appropriating the necessary funds for two commissioners and a strong military escort to go up the Missouri and conclude treaties of peace and friendship with the tribes in that region. An additional provision in this measure authorized the appointment of two sub-agents for the upper Missouri, whose duty it would be to reside in that country and supervise Indian affairs. They were to pay particular attention to the activities of the fur traders and designate specific places for the location of trading establishments.³ Peter Wilson was one of the sub-agents appointed under the act of May 24, 1824, at a salary of \$800 a year.

In addition to serving as an advance man for the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition, Wilson had the specific assign-

² Pierre Dorion did serve as a Sioux sub-agent of sorts for several years prior to 1810. Manuel Lisa, the St. Louis fur trader, was sub-agent for the upper Missouri tribes from 1814 to 1817, and undoubtedly spent considerable time among the Sioux. However, both Dorion and Lisa were primarily interested in the fur trade, and their activities as Indian agents were part time efforts at best.

³ Act of May 25, 1824, *United States Statutes at Large*, IV, p. 35.

ment of keeping the several tribes of Missouri River Sioux friendly to the United States. Past relations with these Indians had not been particularly harmonious. Lewis and Clark nearly became involved in a pitched battle with a sizable band of Teton near the mouth of Bad River in September, 1804. In 1807, some Sioux joined the Arikara in the attack on Ensign Pryor's party returning the Mandan Chief, Big White, to his village. In 1810, they stopped and attempted to rob the Crooks-McClellan trading party near the Big Bend of the Missouri, and the next year attempted unsuccessfully to practice their piracy on the Astorians. During the War of 1812, the Minnesota Sioux and some Missouri River bands as well (the Yanktonai) fought alongside the British in the Old Northwest, although through the efforts of Manuel Lisa, the Teton tribes were kept in a state of uneasy neutrality.⁴

The immediate cause of concern for maintaining friendly relations with the Sioux at the time of Wilson's appointment resulted from the Ashley-Leavenworth punitive expedition against the Arikara in 1823.⁵ Joshua Pilcher, superintendent of the Missouri Fur Company, secured the assistance of nearly 800 Sioux to support the attack upon the Arikara villages. The handling of this operation by Colonel Henry Leavenworth exasperated the Sioux and incurred the wrath of Pilcher, who argued that Leavenworth's lenient treatment of the troublesome Arikara would be misunderstood by the Sioux and other tribes as a sign of weakness on the part of the United States.

⁴ Doane Robinson, "A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians," *South Dakota Historical Collections*, II (1904), pp. 71, 72, 83-93; George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, (Norman, 1937), pp. 34, 35.

⁵ On June 2, 1823, the Arikara treacherously attacked General William Ashley's party of trappers bound for the Yellowstone while the whites were at the Arikara village above Grand River trading for horses. Twenty-three of Ashley's party were killed. Colonel Henry Leavenworth, with a force of 220 men proceeded to the upper Missouri from Fort Atkinson to punish the Arikara, and enroute was reinforced by about 100 trappers and a sizable force of Sioux Indians. (H. M. Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade in the Far West* [New York, 1902], I, 264-270; "Official Correspondence of the Leavenworth Expedition into South Dakota in 1823," edited by Doane Robinson, *South Dakota Historical Collections*, I [1902] 181-256).

Pilcher refused to approve the quasi-treaty that Leavenworth concluded with the Arikara, and as the expedition withdrew down the Missouri, several fur trade employees slipped into the abandoned villages and set them afire.⁶

Whether or not Pilcher's sharp personal attacks on Leavenworth were entirely necessary has been the subject of controversy. There does seem, however, to be substantial evidence to justify the trader's fears regarding the effect the campaign would have upon the Indians. Duke Paul of Wuerttemberg, while on his overland journey to the upper Missouri in August, 1823, met a small party of Yankton Sioux who gave him information about the recent Leavenworth expedition. The Duke wrote: "the [Yankton] man told me much regarding the expedition which the Americans had made against the Arikaras. This expedition had failed of its purpose."⁷ Edwin T. Denig, a long-time fur trader on the Missouri, in remarks on the Arikara campaign written many years later, made the point that Leavenworth's actions left the Sioux with a very low opinion of the Americans' military power.⁸

These impressions were corroborated by contemporary evidence obtained at Fort St. Anthony on the upper Mississippi by Colonel Josiah Snelling. In the spring of 1824, Snelling reported that two Sisseton Sioux had recently arrived at his post with information that the Arikara were attempting to organize a general uprising against the Americans. They had sent war pipes to all the upper Sioux tribes inviting them to join in a confederacy. Already the

⁶ The Leavenworth-Pilcher feud was carried on at great length in the newspapers. A valuable collection of contemporary letters and articles on the subject may be found reprinted in Donald McKay Frost, *Notes on General Ashley, the Overland Trail and South Pass* (Barrie, Massachusetts, 1960), pp. 98-119.

⁷ Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Wuerttemberg, "First Journey to North America in the Years 1822 to 1824," translated by William Bek, *South Dakota Historical Collections*, XIX (1939), p. 400. Later, after learning additional details of the campaign, the Duke expressed approval of Leavenworth's actions, although noting that the fur traders and Indians were still very critical.

⁸ Edwin T. Denig, "Of the Arikaras," edited by John C. Ewers, *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society*, VI (January, 1950), p. 211.

Mandan and two other unnamed tribes had accepted the pipes. The invitation had been refused by most of the chiefs and headmen of the Sioux, although a considerable number of young warriors had gone to join the Arikara in hopes of plunder. They had each been promised a horse by the Arikara for aiding them against the Americans. Colonel Snelling stated further that "one of these Sissetons says he belonged to the party under Mr. Pilcher and that many of that party being dissatisfied with their treatment have joined the Rickaras."⁹

Throughout the spring and summer of 1824, information from the upper Missouri reached St. Louis confirming the fact that the Arikara had gone on the warpath. In March it was reported that five men, employees of Bernard Pratte and Company of St. Louis, from a trading party headed by Joseph Brazeau were killed by Arikara near their abandoned villages above Grand River, and that this same tribe had murdered an employee of the Columbia Fur Company close to Tilton's post at the Mandan villages.¹⁰ These events seem to have alarmed the allies of the Arikara, who had apparently been interested originally in merely plundering the Americans; but had become frightened at these numerous killings. The Mandan broke their agreement with the Arikara and the Gros Ventres warned them that they wanted no part of any hostilities which would bring troops to the upper Missouri.¹¹ This defection of their allies had a sobering effect. In late May or early June, the Arikara sent a delegation to Colonel Leavenworth at Fort Atkinson asking that they not be punished for their hostile actions. They claimed they were merely retaliating against the traders who were responsible for burning their vil-

⁹ Letter of Colonel Josiah Snelling, Fort St. Anthony, April 11, 1824, Upper Missouri Agency, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives (hereafter cited as BIA, NA). This is a copy of Snelling's original communication, and the name of the person to whom it was addressed is omitted.

¹⁰ *Missouri Intelligencer*, March 27, 1824, as reprinted in Frost, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

¹¹ *St. Louis Enquirer*, June 14, 1824, as reprinted in Frost, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

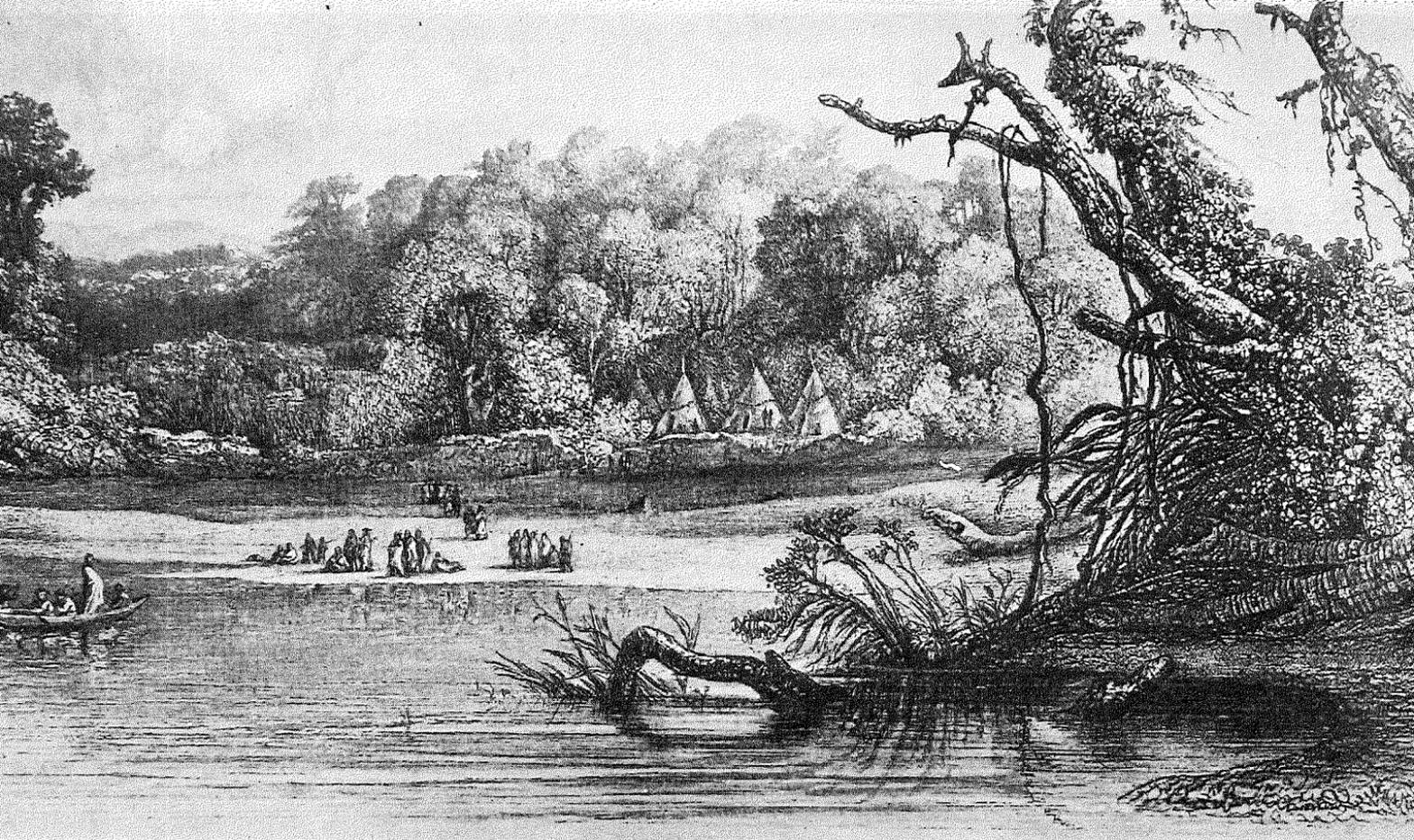
lages.¹² This repentence was short lived, however. In July, the Arikara were reported to have returned to their villages near Grand River, from which point a war party of several hundred men raided the Missouri Fur Company post, Fort Recovery, below the Big Bend, and ran off a number of horses and mules.¹³

American officials in St. Louis and Washington were aware of the serious turn conditions on the upper Missouri had taken, as evidenced by the passage of the act of May 24, 1824, to send the peace commissioners to the western tribes. No known report was received from the upper Missouri definitely connecting the Sioux with hostilities in that quarter. One source did state that the Yankton Sioux were responsible for the murder of the party under Brazeau;¹⁴ but this seems impossible, for the Yankton were the friendliest of the Sioux bands and did not normally roam as high on the Missouri as the point where the attack occurred. Colonel Snelling's information, however, did indicate that many of the young warriors were not particularly friendly to the Americans. The extensive preparations required in assembling the military escort for the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition precluded their departure for the upper Missouri in 1824, before water travel on the river became impossible. It was therefore decided to send Peter Wilson, the newly appointed sub-agent, overland to the upper country for the specific purpose of quieting the Sioux and preventing their becoming involved in developments which would hamper the work of the peace commission when it went up river the next year.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *National Intelligencer*, August 17, 1824, as reprinted in Frost, *op. cit.* p. 125.

¹⁴ *Missouri Republican*, March 29, 1824, as reprinted in Frost, *op. cit.*, p. 123. The only evidence of Sioux hostilities on the Missouri at this time is the reported killing of two trappers, identified only as Stevenson and Kramer, near the mouth of the Cannonball River by Sioux from the St. Peters (Minnesota) River. These men were probably free trappers or deserters from one of the Missouri Fur Company's parties. Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (Indianapolis, 1953), pp. 344, 394.



Tents of the Puncas on the Bank of the Missouri
(After a painting by Charles Bodmer in 1833)



There are several indications that Wilson's appointment as sub-agent and his departure to a form of exile in the wild and desolate country of the upper Missouri was motivated in part by a minor scandal, probably indebtedness. One writer has noted, without apparently realizing the significance of her observation, that Wilson was "in so big a hurry [to leave Washington for St. Louis and his remote post] that he neglected to wait to receive his instructions."¹⁵ Several letters written to his family from the upper Missouri contain vague references to the "scrape" he was in. An earlier communication to Thomas L. McKenney, Superintendent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the War Department, contained the information that Wilson owed between fifty and sixty dollars to acquaintances in the District of Columbia, and transmitted \$20 with the request that McKenney give it to a Mr. John Green of the Navy Department as a partial payment on Wilson's indebtedness. Wilson regreted that he had to trouble McKenney with these personal matters, but did so because the Superintendent was acquainted "with the difficulty which attended my departure from Washington for want of funds. I think [Wilson continued], should any be vile enough to clamour, you may assure them for me that when able, I will pay."¹⁶

At the time of his arrival among the Missouri River Sioux, Peter Wilson was 27 years old. His mother was personally acquainted with Dolly Madison, wife of the fourth President, and young Peter, on August 24, 1814, had been part of Mrs. Madison's escort as she fled the White House just ahead of the invading British forces. He was appointed a Second Lieutenant in the Artillery on August 13, 1819, and served until honorably discharged on June 1, 1821, following the reduction of the military establishment by order of Congress. In December, 1821, Wilson was in Texas, from where he wrote his family about "my friend,

¹⁵ Annie H. Abel, *Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark 1834-1839* (Pierre, 1932), p. xxxviii.

¹⁶ Peter Wilson to Thomas L. McKenney, from Wheeling [Virginia], June 19, 1824, Upper Missouri Agency, BIA, NA.

Mr. [Stephen] Austin" and his efforts to establish a colony at the mouth of the Colorado River. Wilson remained in the southwest through 1823, serving for a time with Commodore David Porter's naval squadron engaged in an effort to rid the Gulf of Mexico and the West Indian waters of pirates and slave traders.

With this combination of honorable, if undistinguished, military service, an apparent taste for the adventurous life, pressing financial problems, and important family connections, it is not surprising that Peter Wilson obtained the appointment as sub-agent for the Upper Missouri following the passage of the act of May 24, 1824. Wilson's letters, herewith reproduced, have been obtained from two sources. His official correspondence to McKenney, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, and Indian Agent Benjamin O'Fallon, are on file in the National Archives.¹⁷ The personal letters to his mother, sister, and close friend, Thomas Cookendorfer, are taken from an obscure little pamphlet by Katherine Gideon Colt, Wilson's great grand-neice, entitled, *The Letters of Peter Wilson, Soldier, Explorer and Indian Agent West of the Mississippi River*.¹⁸ Wilson's official and personal correspondence provides useful insights into the nature of United States Indian policy as it concerned the western Sioux tribes in 1824 and 1825. It is also an intimate picture of life on the upper Missouri among the Teton and other tribes by an observer who had the opportunity to live among them at that early period of their contact with the whites.

Peter Wilson accompanied the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition to the Mandan villages, the location designated as his permanent station. During the winter of 1825-1826 he became seriously ill, and in the spring was taken down to

¹⁷ See the Letters Received file, Upper Missouri Agency, BIA, NA.

¹⁸ With an introduction by Usher L. Burdick, Baltimore, 1940. This has been the source for the biographical information on Wilson prior to his appointment as sub-agent.

Fort Atkinson by traders bound for St. Louis. Wilson's unnamed illness proved fatal, and he died on May 15, 1826. He was buried at Fort Atkinson with full military honors.¹⁹

St. Louis 8th July 1824

Sir:

I have the honor to acquaint you with my arrival at this place.

On my way hither I met Genl Clark²⁰ who ordered me to report to Major O'Fallon²¹ at Fort Atkinson,²² so soon as my arrangements can be made, I shall without delay proceed.

¹⁹ William Clark to James Barbour, May 30, 1826, St. Louis Superintendency, BIA, NA.

²⁰ William Clark at this time was Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis. Following his return with Meriwether Lewis and their party from the Pacific in 1806, Clark was appointed Brigadier General in the territorial militia of Louisiana, later Missouri Territory. In 1813 he was named Governor of Missouri Territory, and held that post until statehood was attained in 1821. Known to the Indian tribes throughout the West as the "Red Headed Chief," he directed the St. Louis Superintendency until his death in 1839. (Reuben Gold Thwaites, "William Clark; Soldier, Explorer, Statesman," *Missouri Historical Society Collections*, II [October, 1906], pp. 1-24.

²¹ Son of the youngest sister of William Clark, Benjamin O'Fallon had been appointed Indian agent for the tribes of the upper Missouri in 1819. His official headquarters were at Council Bluffs. In 1825, together with General Henry Atkinson, he negotiated treaties with 15 tribes on the Missouri River. He resigned his position in 1827 due to ill health, and died in St. Louis in 1842. His father, Dr. James O'Fallon, was a dabbler in foreign intrigue in the West along with General James Wilkinson, George Rogers Clark, and Citizen Genet. (Fred W. Shipman, "Benjamin O'Fallon," *Dictionary of American Biography*, Dumas Malone, editor [New York, 1934], XIII, p. 631.)

²² Fort Atkinson was located less than a mile southeast of the present Fort Calhoun post office. The original military post in this area was Cantonment Missouri, established in the fall of 1819 by troops of the Yellowstone Expedition. When this site was destroyed by river action, a new post was constructed on higher ground and named Cantonment Council Bluffs. In January, 1821, the name of the post was changed to Fort Atkinson, in honor of General Henry Atkinson, commanding officer of the Western Department. Fort Atkinson was abandoned in June, 1827. The site is currently the subject of intensive archeological investigation by the Nebraska State Historical Society. (Sally A. Johnson, "Cantonment Missouri, 1819-1820," *Nebraska History*, XXXVII (June, 1956), and "Fort Atkinson at Council Bluffs," XXXVIII (September, 1957); Marvin F. Kivett, "Excavations at Fort Atkinson, Nebraska A Preliminary Report," XXXX (March, 1959).)

I hope, Sir, by strict attention, and with adherence to principles of industry, to meet the approbation of the Department.

Your letter to Genl Greene has been received.

Honble J.C. Calhoun,
Secretary of War

With great respect
I have the Honor
to be Yr obdt St.
P. Wilson

PRIVATE

St. Louis July 12th 1824

Dear Sir:

Having arrived at this place I take pleasure in communicating to you some few particulars in relation to future movements &c. It was I believe contemplated by the Department that the expedition now preparing would be enabled to commence operations by leaving Council Bluffs for the extreme upper Missouri some time this summer.

In fact the above arrangement was fully expected to be carried into effect, so soon as Genl Atkinson²³ should get here, but since his arrival I understand he has had an interview with some of the most respectable Traders, and they represent it as impracticable for the commissioners and their escort to reach the Mandan villages before the ensuing winter. In consequence of which I believe the Genl.

²³ Henry Atkinson entered the Army in July, 1808 as a Captain in the Third Infantry. Following the War of 1812, he was appointed Colonel of the Sixth Infantry, and in 1819 commanded the Yellowstone Expedition which reached Council Bluffs and constructed Cantonment Missouri. He was given command of the Western Department of the United States Army in May, 1820, with headquarters in St. Louis. He led nearly 500 men of the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition to the upper Missouri in 1825, and was in general command of troops in the Black Hawk War of 1832. General Atkinson died at Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis in 1842. (William J. Ghent, "Henry Atkinson," *Dictionary of American Biography*, Dumas Malone, editor [New York, 1928], I, p. 410.)

has concluded to Winter at the Bluffs, and commence his operations in the spring.²⁴

It was contemplated by Genl Clark that I should accompany the Troops from Belle Fountain²⁵ but as they will not move for some time, I have made arrangements to go up by land, and that [I] leave this [place] in 4 days. Major O'Fallon is still at Council Bluffs, and I am extremely anxious to reach that place before he departs, my objective being to solicit orders for the Sioux Nation (400 miles above the bluffs.) Those Indians have been represented to me as peaceable, friendly and well-disposed, but they being at war with the Ricaras above, and the Maha's below,²⁶ It is supposed that, unless an agent is sent among them, their friendship for the Whites may be lessened. Genl Atkinson has also suggested the propriety of my going this summer, he says it will enable me to dispatch messengers to the Ricaras, Mandans &c &c, giving to them information respecting the commission and that they may certainly expect to have a Talk &c &c—early this summer.

²⁴ The troops that were to accompany the expedition spent the winter at Council Bluffs, but General Atkinson did not. He made a brief visit to the post in November, reporting that the command under Major Stephen W. Kearny had reached there on November 2. Atkinson and O'Fallon left St. Louis in March, 1825, and arrived at Fort Atkinson on April 19. The expedition departed from that post for the upper river on May 16. (Grant Foreman, "River Navigation in the Early Southwest," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XV [June, 1928], p. 38; Report of Henry Atkinson and Benjamin O'Fallon to James Barbour, Secretary of War, November 7, 1825, *American State Papers, Indian Affairs II* [Washington, 1824], p. 605 [hereafter cited as *ASP, IA-II*]; Russell Reid and Clell G. Gannon, editors, "Journal of the Atkinson-O'Fallon Expedition," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, IV [October, 1929], p. 10.)

²⁵ Fort Bellefontaine was located four miles above the mouth of the Missouri River, and about 15 miles by land from St. Louis. In 1803, General James Wilkinson built the first military establishment at that point. The site was washed away by the Missouri, and in 1810, a second post was constructed on higher ground behind the original works. This was occupied by troops until 1826. Edwin James recorded this brief description in 1819: "The houses are of one story, constructed of logs, based upon masonry, and united in the form of a hollow square." (*An Account of an Expedition from Pittsburg to the Rocky Mountains in the Years 1819, 1820*, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*, XIV [Cleveland, 1905], pp. 123, 124.)

²⁶ On the upper Missouri at this time it was quite common usage to refer to the Arikara tribe as "Ricaras" and the Omahas as "Mahas."

From the Bluffs I shall again write, and I beg you to be assured, that the Public Interest in my agency, shall call forth my greatest exertions and strict attention.

Thos. L. McKenney Esq
War Dept.

I am very Respectfully
Yr. Obdt. Servt.
P. Wilson

Liberty²⁷ (Missouri) August 3rd 1824

Sir:

I have the Honor to acquaint you with my arrival at this place on my way to Council Bluffs. I should have reached here at an earlier period, but bad roads and the immeasurable quantity of Flies which infest the prairie at this season prevented me from proceeding so rapidly as I could have wished. This afternoon I shall pass beyond the limits of this State, and hope to reach the Bluffs in eight days. Previous to my leaving St. Louis, I had some conversation with Genl. Atkinson on the subject of my early departure from the Bluffs for the Sioux Nation, information has been received that those Indians are more and more discontent, and should Major O'Fallon accede to the proposition made by Genl. Atkinson, I shall proceed immediately to the Nation and use my utmost endeavors to bring them into the views of the Govt.

Honble J.C. Calhoun
Secretary of War
Washington City

I have the Honor to be
With great respect
Your Obdt Servt
P. Wilson

²⁷ Liberty was a trading center for the settlers in and around Clay County in northwestern Missouri. Settled in 1821, it benefitted immensely from cheap riverboat transportation when Allen's Landing was established three and one-half miles south of Liberty in 1825. (John Barber White, "The Missouri Merchant One Hundred Years Ago," *Missouri Historical Review*, XIII [January, 1919], pp. 109-110.)

Council Bluffs

12th August 1824

Sir:

I have the honor to acquaint you with my arrival at this place, and am only waiting to receive the instructions of Major O'Fallon to enter upon the duties of my station.

To
The Honble J.C. Calhoun
Secretary of War
Washington City

I have the Honor to be
With great respect
Your Obdt Serv't
P. Wilson

Council Bluffs

23rd August 1824

Sir:

I have the honor to inform you that I have this day received from Major B. O'Fallon, Agent of Indian Affairs, an order to proceed to the Grand Bend²⁸ on this river, with instructions to select, and locate myself at a point most convenient to the different tribes of Sioux Indians in that quarter.

I shall leave here in a few days for the nation, and shall prosecute the journey by land.

I am well aware Sir, that by preceding the commissioners and their escort, going among Indians who have but a faint idea of civilization, and a far less Knowledge of our strength, character, and resources, that many serious obstacles may present themselves while in the discharge of my duty; and altho' I shall be in great measure alone during the absence of the commissioners, subject to various privations, it will be my duty to promote the views and

²⁸ The Big Bend of the Missouri is located just north of present-day Chamberlain, South Dakota. At this point the river flows in all four directions before continuing its course south. In 1825, the bend was 25 miles around by water, but only half a mile across the neck of land. (Reid and Gannon, *op. cit.*, p. 23.)

interests of the Government, conciliate the friendship of the Indians, and keep a watchful eye on the Traders.

Honble J.C. Calhoun
Secretary of War
Washington City

I have the Honor to be
With Great Respect
Your Obdt Servt.
P. Wilson

Council Bluffs

August 31st, 1824

Dear Thomas:

I take pleasure to acquaint you with my arrival at this place, after undergoing a variety of fatigue, etc., etc., and leaving Liberty (a small town consisting of a few log huts) at which place we supplied ourselves with such necessaries as were deemed sufficient for a jaunt of 300 miles through uninhabited country, we 30 in no. set off. The third day's travel brought to our recollection the necessity of the strictest economy in our provision department, no game having been seen and from every appearance, no great likelihood of our falling in with any until we should cross the Platte. About this time we were in the vicinity of the place generally termed, and well known by the appellative of the "Lost Trace." Being strangers to the road (which is only a single path) we were somewhat at a loss as to the manner of proceeding. This was owing in a great measure to the impossibility on our part of travelling during the day. The prairie flies which infest this section of the country during the summer season, and the sting of them being so very severe upon animals, together with them, we were induced, or rather I may say compelled to retire to the woods, lay by, and at night sally forth and pursue the path. The first night we lost ourselves after going about 5 miles. The next morning we succeeded in reaching the path, but in consequence of the flies, we very soon had to take to the woods. We were at this time on the "Lost Trace" but from our indistinct knowledge of the country we were not aware of it until midnight, when to our surprise and mortification our road turned out to be no road at all: Retracing the many steps we had accomplished, and pondering upon the critical situation in which we were now placed, daylight made its

appearance and we found ourselves nearly in the place from the one where we had started. At night we again resumed our journey by leading the way in a N.W. direction over rivers, prairies and hills without a path, when about 12 o'clock we were enabled to discern by the help of the moon a small trace which we deemed it prudent to follow. Continuing, at about 5 miles we struck upon another still larger, and just before day we had the satisfaction to enter a large path which proved to be the direct one to this place. After crossing the Platte River our difficulties increased, as we had to bridge, swim and raft almost every river, creek and ravine to within 19 miles of this place.²⁹ The 4 last days of which we were starving and I can assure you that we lost a fine horse owing to our weakness and debility. The horse of which I speak, in crossing one of the creeks mired and in that situation we left him, being unable to reach him. Upon the whole it is the d—st road I ever travelled in my life.

I shall leave this place in a few days for the Sioux Tribe, at the great bend of the river. The distance is only 500 miles and I think I shall get up in time to make arrangements for the winter, and in the spring it is my intention to accompany the Commissioners as high up as the Mandan villages.

You shall hear from me every opportunity,

Mr. Thomas Cookendorfer
Washington City
D. Col.

My love to all, believe me
Yours truly
P. Wilson

²⁹ The *Missouri Intelligencer* of May 6, 1823, supplies more detail on the route from Liberty to Council Bluffs than is contained in Wilson's letter. "We noticed some weeks since that a road had lately been completed from Fort Atkinson, (Council Bluffs) to Liberty, in this State—distance about 300 miles—since which we have learned that this road was opened under the inspection of Captain J. S. Gray, by twenty-four soldiers of the Sixth Regt. U.S. Infantry, in 40 days, between the 1st of January, and the 10th of February last. During this time nineteen bridges and five canoes were built. The bridges except one, are constructed of round logs, with log-pen abutments, and covered with poles or split timber. Those on the larger streams are from 30 to 85 feet long and from 15 to 20 feet high. The canoes were placed at the fords of the Nichananabottana, Tinkio, Nodawa, Buchannin's Fork, & the N.W. branch of the Platte rivers; at all [of] which places are good fords with firm sand or rock bottoms." (*Missouri Historical Society Collections*, II [October, 1906], p. 93.)

Council Bluffs

13 Sept., 1824

My dear Mother:

You will no doubt think it somewhat strange that I have not penned a letter to you since I left you, but you must attribute it to the only and true cause; 'tis my way and you know it.

Now, what shall I say. I am at a loss, I am sure—tell you about the Indians, you don't wish to hear it, or do you know anything concerning them or the country? There is nothing in it you can wish to hear of, and to be candid I know not what to say.

Perhaps if I should begin a letter in the old way "this comes hoping, etc., etc., etc.," you would say I was quizzing. Then to tell you that I have suffered privation, fatigue, etc., etc., would only serve to pain and distress you and I could not relate to you anything which could amuse you.

I shall leave here in a few days for the Sioux Nation of Indians, and contemplate wintering among them.

My station for the present is the Grand Bend, and by reference to a map and looking at the place near the foot on the left hand side ascending you will see the spot, and 'ere this reaches you, I shall be there.

I have no news, give my love to the family, and believe me your affectionate son

P. Wilson

When you write direct to Council Bluffs, via Liberty, Missouri.

Mouth of L'eau qui coure³⁰ Poncas Village

4th October 1824

Sir:

I have the honor to inform you that I am this far on

³⁰ The Niobrara River. It appears from the records of the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition that the Ponca dirt village was not actually at the mouth of the Niobrara, but rather six and one-half miles below, at the mouth of White Paint or Bazile Creek. When Lewis and Clark visited the Poncas in 1804, their village was located on Ponca Creek, a few miles above the Niobrara. (Reid and Gannon, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 19; Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 1804-1806, [New York, 1904] I part II, p. 140.)

my way to the Grand Bend. This morning just as we touched the shore a small party of Poncas made their appearance and from them I learned that the whole Nation was coming in and would be up shortly. In one hour after they arrived. The cries and lamentations made by them while approaching, convinced me that some sad disaster, or misfortune had happened.

Considering it important that I should apprise them of my arrival in this country as well as to make known to them that Gen'l. Atkinson and yourself had been by the President appointed Commissioners to treat with different tribes on the Missouri, for the purpose of restoring Peace and Happiness among them; intimating the the [sic] probable time of your departure from the Bluffs; and after assuring them of the pacific disposition of Gov't. in sending the Military Escorts which will accompany you etc etc etc. I told them I was ready to listen to what they had to say. The first that spoke was the son of the deceased chief Shota-gah-hah (The Smoke)³¹ from him I learned that he had just returned with a few others, (and they barely escaped with their lives several of them exhibiting wounds) from the Sowans.³²

It seems that Thirty of the Poncas including all their chiefs were on a visit to the Oglala's³³ when by accident they fell in with a number of Lodge's belonging to the Sowans, by whom they were treated friendly, receiving attention, smoked and had a talk: after leaving those lodge's and proceeding on their journey, they were overtaken by a party of the same Sowans, who, without cause or provocation commenced upon them an indiscriminate attack, insomuch, that out of the thirty, twelve only escaped;

³¹ The younger Smoke was painted by George Catlin in 1832. (George I. Quimby, *Indians of the Western Frontier* [Chicago, 1954], p. 43.)

³² The Sawons or Saones was a name used quite frequently on the upper Missouri during the first half of the 19th Century in reference to the five northern Teton tribes, the Miniconjou, Sans Arcs, Two Kettles, Hunkpapa, and Blackfeet, and a portion of the Yanktonai. After 1850, the term was rarely mentioned, and its origin and meaning have never been definitely established. (Harry H. Anderson, "An investigation of the early bands of the Saone Group of Teton Sioux," *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, XXXVI [March, 1956], pp. 87-94.)

³³ The Oglala were one of the two southern Teton tribes, and probably the first to cross the Missouri River and reach the Black Hills. For a history of these people, see George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk* (Norman, 1937).

and had it not been for the timely arrival of some chiefs who interposed not one would have been spared to tell the tale.

The injury and loss they have sustained by this visit (which was friendly) can never be repaired, many of their chiefs were aged and infirm, in consequence of which they were unable to fly from their pursuers, but had tamely to submit to their fate. I regret to say they were *all* kill'd, and the Poncas have not one chief among them. These Indians Sir; are in a deplorable situation I have condoled with them, and have given assurances that their case should be represented to the proper department.

As my stay was short, I had not an opportunity of making myself so well acquainted with them as I could have wished, but I understand their friendship for the whites is strong and of seeming lastness. The Nation appearing miserable for want of a Head to guide and lead them, and understanding that the Son of Sho-ta-gah-hah was one of the first, and generally listened to by the Nation (he having his deceased fathers medal) I took the responsibility upon myself to make him a chief (he taking the former name of his father) at the same time giving him and them present, to understand clearly that upon the arrival of yourself and Gen'l. Atkinson, any appointment made by you to the contrary would cancel mine.³⁴ For your consideration I submit the above, and hope the same may meet the approbation of yourself and the Department.

Major B. O'Fallon
Agent Ind. Aff's
Mo

I have the honor to be
With great respect
Yr. Obdt. St.
P. Wilson
Ind. Agt.

³⁴ Wilson's actions were confirmed by Agent O'Fallon the following year, when the younger Smoke was officially recognized as a chief and given a government medal as a badge of office. (Reid and Gannon, *op. cit.*, p. 19.)

Grand Bend of the Missouri³⁵

19 October 1824

Sir:

Since my arrival I have endeavored as far as practicable to collect such facts in relation to the late massacre of the Ponca Chiefs as might be useful and important to the department.

The circumstances represented to me at this place correspond nearly with the statement made in my communication of the 4th inst. and [I] believe the same may be entitled to the fullest credit.

With great respect

Major B. O'Fallon

Yr Obedt Sevt.

Agent Ind Affs

P. Wilson

Mo

S[ub] Ind. Agt

P.S.

Herewith I transmit the number of persons consisting at present the whole Ponca Nation viz.

Two Hundred Warriors

Ten old men

Two Hundred Boys and Girls &

Two Hundred and Sixty Women

making in all Six Hundred & Seventy.

670 persons³⁶

Respectfully,

P. Wilson

S Ind. Agt

³⁵ Wilson's residence at the Big Bend was at Fort Kiowa (also called Fort Lookout or Fort Brazeau), the fur post belonging to Bernard Pratte and Company of St. Louis. The only other post in the Big Bend area, Fort Recovery, operated by Joshua Pilcher's Missouri Fur Company, had been abandoned during the summer of 1824. Reid and Gannon, p. 21; Morgan, pp. 113, 376.

³⁶ Lewis and Clark in 1804 gave the Ponca population as 200 people, 50 of whom being warriors, and stated that the tribe had suffered severe losses from smallpox and warfare with the Sioux. (Thwaites, *Original Journals*, IV part I, p. 88.)

Grand Bend of Missouri

October 23rd 1824

Sir:

I have the honor to inform you that I arrived at this place on the 12th inst. after a passage of 27 days from Council Bluffs. I found here about twenty lodge's principally Yanctons;³⁷ some few Tetons and one or two Sowans. The day after my arrival I was visited by several chiefs (Yanctons) & the most distinguished men of the tribe Viz. The Little Dish, Medicine Soul, White Crane and Little Soldier,³⁸ to whom I imparted the motive by which the Govt was induced to send me among them, concluding with sundry other information embraced in your instructions of the 21st of August.

Finding their disposition pliable, and considering it all necessary, as well as important, that a Peace should be effected as early as practicable between them and the Mahars,³⁹ I made it a matter of consequence and briefly communicated to them my ideas relative to the advantages both parties would derive by having a friendly understanding with each other and amicable adjustment of their existing difficulties.

The first named Chiefs spoke in turn, but from them I could not obtain a satisfactory answer; on the contrary I discovered a manifest disposition on their part to evade as much as possible the subject which had been laid before them. The Little Soldier now arose with all the dignity of an accomplished orator, his whole soul breathing the sentiments of one who seemed to feel what he spoke, addressing himself occasionally to the Chiefs and those around, recapitulating to them their former situation, the advantages

³⁷ "The Yanctons are a band of Sioux, and rove in the plains north of the Missouri from near the Great Bend, down as far as the Sioux river. . . . They are pretty well supplied with fuseses, and with horses, and a few mules. They are estimated at 3,000 souls, of which 600 are warriors." *ASP, IA-II*, p. 606.

³⁸ Little Dish, Medicine Soul, and Little Soldier signed as chiefs of the Yankton tribe on the Atkinson-O'Fallon treaty concluded at Fort Lookout (Kiowa) on June 22, 1825. (Charles J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs Laws and Treaties* [Washington, 1904], II, p. 229.)

³⁹ The Sioux-Omaha war was an affair of long standing. In 1804, while in a Sioux camp near the mouth of Bad River, William Clark wrote: "In this Tribe I saw 25 Squars and Boys taken 13 days ago in a battle with the Mahars in this battle they Destroyd 40 Lodges, Killed 75 Men, & som boys & Children, & took 48 Prisoners Women & boys . . ." (Thwaites, *Original Journals*, I part II, pp. 168-169.)

that have resulted to them since their intercourse with the whites, reproving them for their want of penetration and seeming unwillingness to speak their minds freely, and after seriously admonishing them to listen to the Words which had been spoken, I had the satisfaction to hear him say that "as I wished a Peace, a *Peace could and should be made.*"

To this the other chiefs readily gave their assent, and requested me to inform the Mahars, that they would meet them at the mouth of L'eau qui coure, at which place they were willing to bury former animosities, and enter into the terms of a Treaty.

Major B. O'Fallon

Agent Ind. Aff's

Mo

I have the honor to be
With Great respect

Yr obdt St.

P. Wilson

S Ind Agt.

P.S.

Since writing the within several chiefs of the Tetons⁴⁰ have arrived; with them I have had an interview. They perfectly coincide with the Yanctons and wish for Peace, in consequence of which, I shall send to the Mahas and request them to inform me at what time they will meet the Sioux chiefs at the mouth of L'eau qui coure for the purpose of making a Peace.

Respectfully

P. Wilson

S Ind agt

⁴⁰ The Teton Sioux are generally considered to be the seven western or prairie tribes, the Brule, Oglala, Miniconjou, Sans Arc, Two Kettle, Hunkpapa, and Blackfeet; but as late as 1842 this term was used on the upper Missouri as a designation for the Brule only. There is evidence which indicates that the Brules were the parent stock of the seven Teton groups. A recent history of this tribe is George E. Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk* (Norman, 1961).

Grand Bend of Missouri 24th Oct. 1824

Sir:

I have the honor to acquaint you with my arrival at this place, and for the information of the department, transmit copy's of letters which I have just forwarded to Major O'Fallon.

Circumstances require my presence near the line which divides the Sioux's from the Airrickaras,⁴¹ and I shall set out for that place in a day or two. After my return it will be necessary that I should accompany the Sioux Chiefs for the purpose of making Peace between them and the Maha's.

The living in this country is rather miserable, but being accustomed heretofore to such inconveniences, I am getting perfectly reconciled.

Honble J.C. Calhoun
Secretary of War
Washington City

I have the honor to be
With Great respect
P. Wilson

Sioux Village
Grand Bend of Missouri
27th March 1825

My dear Sister:

You are no doubt by this time apprised of my arrival in this region of solitary remoteness. It would be difficult for me to portray to your imagination a fair description of the wide and romantic country, or at least such one as might be satisfactory to me. Suffice to say, I am cut off as 'twere from the rest of mankind, enduring various privations and encountering all the difficulties incident to an undertaking of the kind, and one which the Gov't. has entrusted to me. So far I have succeeded to the utmost of my

⁴¹ The Arikara villages were located several miles above Grand River, at Oak Creek. They had been abandoned and burned as a result of the Ashley-Leavenworth campaign in 1823, but the Arikara returned and rebuilt them in the spring of 1824. Just where the "line" was which divided the Arikara country from that of the Sioux is difficult to determine. Perhaps it was Grand River, or maybe the Cheyenne.

wishes. The Indians are peaceable, well disposed, and I can have as yet no cause for censure or complaint. In Nov. last my business required some attention among the Upper Sioux and it being fine weather, I left this place, attended by my interpreter, reached the place of my destination, settled my affairs among the Ind's and Traders⁴² and returned again in seven days. I left the Little Missouri in a fall of snow, and when I reached the high prairies it increased to a perfect gale. To enter into detail of a snow storm would be tedious, and swell this epistle to a length, which I know would not tire your patience, but it might tire your brother's fingers to pen it. I will only cite your attention by referring you to Lewis and Clarke's travels. I mark one in their narrative. I lay out three days on my return and made what I call a tolerable escape. Since which we have had another [storm] and I think a much more severe one. Mssrs. B. Pratt & Co., of St. Louis (traders) had two men frozen to death in it about 25 miles from this place. Their names were LaCroiz and LaPreze, Frenchmen, Creoles. The former was found, brought to this place and buried on the 21st of Jan'y. The other body of the latter has not yet been seen, but he no doubt shared the same fate with his unfortunate companion.

I have just returned from a trip to two villages of Sioux, namely, the Teton & Oglallas bands. The former consists of 1900 persons and the latter 1243.⁴³ I found them on the head of the Little Missouri, distant from this place about 170 miles, separated from each other about 15 or 20 miles.⁴⁴

This is the first time I ever experienced true Indian civility. The Chiefs met me about one-half mile from their village, mounted me upon one of their finest horses, which was covered with a superbly ornamented porcupine robes,

⁴² Information is scanty on the location of trading establishments between the Big Bend and the Arikara villages. Pilcher's Missouri Fur Company had a post somewhere above Big Bend in 1820. Atkinson and O'Fallon's report mentions another post at the mouth of Bad River in 1825 (Fort Tecumseh?), and a year earlier, O'Fallon had approved the mouth of the Cheyenne as a proper location for the traders. (*ASP, IA-II*, pp. 454, 606; William Clark to John C. Calhoun, December 19, 1824, St. Louis Superintendency, BIA, NA.)

⁴³ Atkinson and O'Fallon gave the Teton (Brule) a population of 3,000 and the Oglala, 1,500. (*ASP, IA-II*, p. 606.)

⁴⁴ Bad River was also called the Little Missouri and Teton River. Wilson's distances are slightly exaggerated. The headwaters of Bad River are only about 130 to 140 miles from his post below the Big Bend.

and one of their soldiers, drawing the horse after him, the chiefs leading the way, and thus with Indian magnificence was I conducted to the lodge prepared for my reception. There, of course, was a feast in readiness consisting of Dogs and Buffalo meat. The dog I left off, but the other was excellent, and my being hungry, the relish was a good one. After communicating my wishes to them, etc., etc., I left those children of nature apparently satisfied, and well pleased that I had come so far to see them. The horse, rope and robe was a present. I am now anxiously looking for the period when the Commissioners and their escort will get here and until then I shall be left nearly alone as the Traders all leave this country in the spring of the year and go to St. Louis, and when they depart which will be in a day or two, I shall be left with my boy and only 2 other men, and these will constitute the whites in this country on this side of Council Bluffs, distant from here 400 miles by land 7000 by water or thereabouts.

Your letter is the only one I have rec'd from any of my friends since I have been in this country and I cannot acc't for Tommy's not writing me. If the mail has not miscarried, I ought to have had answers to my letters 'ere this. I shall, however, write to him by this opportunity. You wish to know when I think it probable that I may return. Do not, I beg you, ask that question again, for I am sure it will not be in my power to answer * * * *, and should not draw your attention further. I silently give rest to this * * * and will conclude by giving my love to Mother, the children, Willard and all my relatives and anticipate the pleasure of shortly hearing from you, I remain with sincere affection yours truly Loving Brother.

P. Wilson

[Written across the above letter]

3rd. of April, 1825

You will no doubt perceive that I have headed my letter Sioux Village which, bye the bye, is not a village at all. This will appear to you as strange perhaps as the unusual method I am now pursuing (ie) writing cross-wise. But

not knowing of any post office regulation that prohibits or discountenances an innocent infringement of this nature, I am disposed to run the hazard of breaking at present and for once only, the law.

To begin where I left off—respecting the Sioux Village, you must know that a village of Sioux can be erected in the short space of fifteen minutes, and in the same length of time if necessarily hurried, the whole village consisting of 2000 persons and upwards, can be packed up and on the march. This may as I have mentioned appear strange to you, but 'tis no less strange than true. They live in skin lodges or kind of pavillion calculated to hold 12 or 15 persons—say a family of men, women and children. This lodge is at the bottom about 45 feet in circumference and goes up to a point resembling a cone; it is made of dried buffalo skins fancifully painted outside with horses, deer, goats and Indian notions, and is furnished with from 18 to 20 poles of 25 to 30 feet in length, which when set up, the lodge is raised upon a single pole, the end of which falls among the others. It is then brought around to the front where both ends are fastened together by means of sticks, the bottom pinned down with pegs, a fire made in the center, skins spread round to lie and sit upon, and as near as I can in a hurried manner give it to you, this is what may be called an Indian House, and I assure you that two or three hundred of them together has a fine effect. It is presumed that as I have commenced this lengthy detail you will look (as usual) for a continuation of it, and I will satisfy your patience by * * * * to them different bands, etc. etc. The Sioux are much derided, but then * * * * which may never happen, they would be the most formidable natives known in N. America. They are a stout athletic Indian, brave to a man and indisputably the best of hunters. They are comprised of the following bands, Yanktons, Tontons, Ogallallas, Soisans, Aing Pappas, Yanktonies, Lanta,⁴⁵ and some others, which I have not seen. These bands are all separated but speak the same language. They frequently unite, that is two together, but seldom remain long in that situation. They have but few differences, and when one happens to exist, it is usually a personal affair, and is settled in the Indian manner. If it is a quarrel of serious nature, it ends by the death of one or the other of the party,

⁴⁵Wilson's "Soisans, Aing Pappas and Lanta" should read Saones, Hunkpapas, and Santee. The latter is a general designation for the eastern or Minnesota Sioux.

and not infrequently both. Two of the latter have happened since I am here. Both fell in the conflict. The Tetons have 1940 persons in their band, including men, women, and children. The Ogallallas, 1243. These are the only two I have yet had it in my power to ascertain, and by these the rest may be computed. The first six bands I have named have made, dressed, and traded this season (winter hunt), upwards of 13,000 merchantable buffalo robes, so you may form some idea of the magnitude of their hunt. The squaws do all the drudgery—dress all the robes, take care of the children, pitch and strike all the lodges, pack the horse, bring all the wood, in fact they are to all intents and purposes their beasts of burden.

As I mentioned before, I shall shortly be left alone. The Indians are all going out to make hunt, the traders are just on the 'eve of their departure, and your brother is not at all downcast as the prospect of so sudden a change. Philosophy, if not experience, has taught me how a man is to bouy up under circumstances of this description, and altho' tis hard for one to remain alone and I may add unprotected in this dreary wild, I still I have no fear, nor the slightest disposition to remove until I may receive permission from the proper department. There is one thing which I have omitted to mention to you and it is to me a serious consideration, altho I have not considered it sufficiently interesting as yet to communicate. I am and have been for near two months on the verge of starvation, and for the first time in my life, I had a few days since to partake of some dog meat and I do assure you I must henceforward banish from my mind all superstitious reasoning as to the quality of the flesh of that useful animal. It may be owing to their being part wolf I had a disgusting antipathy for such a practice, but I have altered my mind, and I now think dog meat excellent. The Indians hold it in the highest esteem, and the greatest honor they can confer upon a white man is the preparation of a sumptuous feast of dogs. I presume I have had not less than 50 or 60 killed and cooked on my acc't. Buffalo are very scarce at present, and the Indians are starving. I think if it continues so, I shall be compelled to go down the river shortly so far as I may be likely to meet the troops.

Teton River⁴⁶ near the
Missouri

7th. of July, 1825

My dear Sister:

I have only time to say that the expedition has advanced for far without meeting with any accident, and, I anticipate a continuation of the good luck already met with. The river is much better above and I may conjecture (should nothing intervene to impede our progress) a possibility of reaching the Mandans by the 1st of August.

Today a grand council was held—present—the Cheyennes,⁴⁷ the Ogallallas, and a part of the Band of Sousans,⁴⁸ the last two being Sioux. Everything was satisfactorily accomplished and we leave here tomorrow.

I am determined to turn Indian. Frustrated as I have been in various ways, it behooves me to look to the windward and keep a better watch for the lee shore. You must not expect from me long letters. I have nothing now to communicate, but so soon as I get permanently located among my Mandan children, possibly something may arise, which in an Indian principle (politically speaking) may induce me to give you a fair and impartial statement of all that transpires. I believe I mentioned to you that I intend remaining here until the year following next (i e) that is in July, 1827; if I am blest with health, you will see me in Washington. My love to mother, Willard and family, and in great haste.

⁴⁶ When this letter was written, Wilson was accompanying the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition. They had left the Big Bend on June 23 and arrived at Bad River on June 29, camping two and one-half miles above its mouth on the broad plain where the well-known fur post, Fort Pierre Chouteau, was erected in 1832. The expedition remained at this location until July 7, concluding treaties with the Saone, Oglala, and Cheyenne. Wilson's dating of this letter, July 7, is an error. The council he mentions took place on July 6. (Reid and Gannon, p. 28.)

⁴⁷ The Cheyennes at this time were roaming in the region east of the Black Hills on the upper Bad and Cheyenne Rivers. They occasionally met traders at the mouth of Cherry Creek on the Cheyenne. Atkinson and O'Fallon give them a population of 3,000, with about 600 warriors. (*ASP, IA-II*, p. 606.)

⁴⁸ Saones. This group later developed into the Miniconjou and Sans Arcs tribes. Atkinson and O'Fallon made a treaty with the Blackfeet Saones on July 11. (Reid and Gannon, p. 29.)

In a hurry, your affectionate brother

P. Wilson

Good bye.

I intended to send you a present via New Orleans; the porcupine buffalo robe which I got from the Indians when I visited them at the village that composed part of the outfit. You will perhaps think me selfish for writing so short a scrawl, but indeed Sister, I have nothing which would interest you except I should enlarge upon the ideas entertained by the Indians with regard to the expedition now on foot. It might be for a moment a source of satisfaction to you, but so much already has been scribbled off by itinerant handling that I should feel considerable in the background were I to attempt to meet them or try to cope with them on the quality scale.

You must wait patiently for a retrograde movement on my part. When it is made, look out for lots of letters. I am now sure that your patience is more or less exhausted by this nonsensical attempt of mine to crawl out of a scrape which you undoubtedly view in its own real light, but let me off this time, and a further correspondence will follow from your brother, to be one among, and at least a disciple of your own school.

Adeiu, your affectionate brother

P. Wilson