

Letter from Jacob Spaulding to U.S. Grant 1 September 1873

Context of the Letter

The following letter was written by BRF pioneer Jacob Spaulding to President Grant and came at the moment that plans were being made to carry out the “final” removal of the Winnebago (Ho-chunk) people from Wisconsin. As recounted in Lawrence Onsager’s 1985 thesis, The Removal of the Winnebago Indians From Wisconsin in 1873-74, “*The strategy of at least a portion of the Wisconsin Winnebago and their white supporters led by Jacob Spaulding was to battle and prolong any action in the matter of removal until the next session of Congress. At that time they planned to send both Indian and white delegates to Washington in hope of inducing Congress to rescind the removal legislation and provide them with a reservation in Wisconsin. On September 1, Jacob Spaulding wrote President Grant in an attempt to enlist his aid in preventing the removal.*”

Note on the Transcription

The 850 word letter from Spaulding has been transcribed as accurately as possible from the original text. Some portions of the letter, as noted, proved difficult to read.

Black River Falls Sept 1st 1873

To the Honorable U.S. Grant
President of the United States
Washington DC

Dear Sir,

It may be presuming too much from my part to address you as I do now, but when I tell you that it is in the interests of the Winnebago Indians whose cause I have at heart, you will perhaps bear with me, and favor me with an answer stating your views.

In the first place will say, that I am a resident of this place and have resided here for the past thirty-four years. Having been engaged in the lumbering and mercantile business through which I have become well acquainted with the above named Indians, as I also am with the Chippeways [*sic*] and Menomonies, and know them to be honest and perfectly harmless. I have traded thousands of dollars with them, and have found them upright in all their dealings.

I am not going theorize but speak whereof I know. Being the first settler north of Prairie-du-Chien and in this part of the country, I have been surrounded by thousands of them and knowing them and the treatment they have received since they sold this tract of land to the Government 35 years ago. I have followed their movements since by an action of the Government, they have now removed to a reservation west of Prairie-du-Chien, thence to Minnesota when the Sioux difficulty broke out and finally to Nebraska where now about 1/3 of their number reside or are compelled to stay under the control of the Government. On the 19th met, by request of Capt. Hunt, the commissioner for their removal, and the remainder of the tribe now located near hear [*sic*], I met in council with them at Big Springs. Among the number were Gray Wolf and little Decora, the Chiefs brought by Capt. Hunt from Nebraska for the sole purpose of persuading their brethren to go with them to Nebraska. These Chiefs told their brethren in that council that they stayed

in Nebraska because they were compelled to; that they were poor, that they had no money and fared badly. That but a small portion of the West Bank of the Missouri River is woodland and the little there is, is large cotton wood which you know is not fit for wood by any means, green or dry. That this money is all used in what agents call improvements and that they lack for sufficient supply from their farms, further that interests on \$1,100,000 due them this month is all charged to them before due for improvements is that they have no money at any time, nor any means of getting any. These Indians I have known personally for 34 years and believe them to be honest and that they tell the truth. The remainder of the tribe number about 2000 including those that fought in the late war, and those that own land in this State; the latter number is large including their families. Now what these Indians desire, and what any good citizen within my acquaintance, and that is by no means limited, is to be fairly dealt with, paid what they are justly and legally entitled to, and to have deeded to them by the Government, through their agent, parcels of land to heads of families, as citizens and not as a tribe, their choice of location. This choice is limited to the following Townships (he delineates the Townships – the writing is unclear) The State lands are for sale from 50 to 80 cts. per acre, including fee. The government land will remain av. (?) for all of white citizens buying it and as these Indians want it only in the name of the Great Master of the Universe and the Noble United States, can they have it? They ask this small portion to be guaranteed to them as their homestead by their Great Father at Washington whose protection they desire, not granted merely but paid as a part of what they justly deem belongs to them from their first sale of lands to the Government. These lands which they desire are peculiarly fitted for them, being mostly swamp lands adapted to the raising of cranberries, huckleberries, and grass with sufficient wood to satisfy their demands. That they are not industrious is a mistake; During the feat season alone they have sold from \$25,000 to #30,000 worth of huckleberries in this vicinity, and they are now busily engaged in picking (?) and cranberries from which they will derive about as much and over. Besides this, very many of them have commenced work in the pineries and are doing well . . . Through the misfortunes (?) of very many of these Indians . . . I have been induced to communicate with your and I sincerely hope that you will carefully consider this matter, and if consistent, defer any further proceedings towards this removal until they can be fully heard and their best interests consulted.

Hoping that this may be formally received and deemed no intrusion, --

I remain
Yours truly
Jacob Spaulding

SOURCE:

Jacob Spaulding to U.S. Grant, 1 September 1873, M234, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll 944, Microfilm copy, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.