

Letters of Henry Dodge to Gen. George W. Jones

Henry Dodge

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LETTERS OF HENRY DODGE TO GEN. GEORGE W. JONES.

EDITED BY DR. WILLIAM SALTER.

(Concluded from page 400.)

XXII.

MADISON (WISCONSIN T^Y.), December 17, 1838.

Hon. George W. Jones, Washington City:

Your letter dated on the 18th ult. from Springfield I only received on yesterday. The subject of Banks is of vital importance to the people of Wisconsin. Banking upon proper principles might profit the citizens of Wisconsin, but when our banks are in the hands of swindlers, it is a state of the things that calls loudly for redress. I received a letter on the subject of banks of this Territory from Mr. Woodbury (U. S. Secretary of the Treasury, 1834-'41), asking for information on that subject. I have answered his letter. I hope you will retain your seat during the present session of Congress. Your letter from the steamboat Des Moines I answered immediately and enclosed to you at Washington a copy of your certificate of election. I will forward you a copy of the officers commissioned with a list of the Post offices, as far as I know them. When at Washington I handed you a letter to hand to the President (Martin Van Buren) recommending some gentlemen to fill the office of Generals of the militia. I have heard nothing from the President on that subject. Will you have the goodness to make the proper inquiry? The division of the Territory may have prevented the action of the President on that subject. I must have the militia organized by Spring. We may have some difficulty with the Winnebago Indians, and I am determined to be prepared for them.

XXIII.

Paschal Bequette served in the Black Hawk war, was at the battles of Pecatonica and Wisconsin Heights under Col. Dodge, and married his daughter Elizabeth. The "disputed territory" alluded to in this letter is that portion of the State of Illinois "which lies north of an east and west line drawn through the southerly extreme of Lake Michigan," as prescribed in the Ordinance of 1787.

MINERAL POINT, March 3, 1840.

Col. George W. Jones, Sinsinawa Mound:

Permit me to congratulate you on your appointment as Surveyor General; it is a triumph over your enemies, particularly Doty and Chapman, and will be a source of gratification to your numerous friends in Wisconsin and Iowa. When Col. Bequette handed me your letter, and I discovered

you had your information through Doctor Linn which I considered authentic, it produced a gratification of feeling which I had not experienced for some time. Bequette was delighted, and, as I remarked to him, I expected that Augustus would jump up for joy when he heard of your appointment. I have no doubt Dr. Linn pressed your claims on the President in the strongest terms, told him you had risked your popularity and standing by acting as the friend of Cilley who fell fighting the battles of the party, and that your services as Delegate as well as your devotion to Democratic principles presented you in a strong point of view for Executive favor; and that the Doctor would not forget to call the attention of the President to his warm and efficient support of the President's administration, and the deep interest he had in your welfare as a personal friend. I have no doubt from my knowledge of the disposition and feelings of Doctor Linn that there is no man living that he is as much attached to as yourself. The appointment I consider the best office in the two Territories; it will suit you in every respect, and enable you to be extremely serviceable to your friends in a political point of view.

I am much gratified that you expressed your views to Col. Benton in relation to Doty. In a letter I addressed to him a few days since I stated that Doty and Chapman had been elected to Congress because the people of the Territories they represent were not acquainted with their true character, for at heart they were Whigs and opposed to the measures of the present administration. . . . The southern Boundary question is a hobby, I discover, with Doty. He appears anxious to serve the people residing within the disputed territory, and expects to acquire some celebrity as a politician which will secure his election to the U. S. Senate at the organization of the State of Wisconsin.

XXIV.

Henry Dodge was Delegate to Congress from Wisconsin Territory, 1841-5. His son Augustus was at the same time Delegate from Iowa Territory. A few extracts from letters of that period follow:

WASHINGTON, January 14, 1842.

General Geo. W. Jones, Sinsinawa, Wis. Ty.:

Col. Benton added yesterday even to his great reputation as a debater and an able statesman. No Whig felt disposed to reply to him. [The speech was for "hard money": "It may seem paradoxical, but it is true, that there is no abundant currency, low interest, and facility of loans, except in hard money countries: paper makes scarcity, high interest, usury, extortion, and difficulty of borrowing. Ignorance supposes that to make money plenty, you must have paper: this is pure nonsense. Paper drives away specie, and then dies itself for want of specie; and leaves the country penniless until it can recruit." The speech is reported in Benton's "Thirty Years' View," Chapter 90, Vol. II, pp. 376-395.]

JUNE 14, 1842. I had the pleasure of receiving your esteemed favor of the 15th ult. some days since, and but for the pressure of imperious calls on my time I would have answered you at an earlier date. Augustus' health is improving. His uncle (Dr. Linn) thinks it will take some time before he will be entirely well. His illness has been a great loss to him in keeping up his correspondence with his constituents, who are pressing in their calls. No man knows better the labors a Delegate has to perform than yourself.

You will see from my remarks in the House that I treated his Excellency (James D. Doty, then Governor of Wisconsin Territory) with great courtesy. Nothing saves him but the influence Webster (then Secretary of State) has with Tyler (President U. S.); I sincerely believe that Webster, Tallmadge (subsequently for eight months, 1844-5, Governor of Wisconsin Territory), and Tyler are the only men who do not believe that Doty should be removed immediately from office. I shall keep a good look-out while I am here, and will make D. a heavy weight for Tyler to carry before I am done with him.

As respects your being reinstated in the office of Surveyor-General, much as your friends desire it, I do not think that you can calculate upon anything from this administration. I have talked to Doctor Linn and Augustus, and they are of the same opinion. They think under the Democratic administration you will be restored to the office from which you have been so unjustly removed. Could Doty have been removed, Wise (Henry A. Wise, M. C., of Virginia) would have united with your friends in recommending you for the office of Governor. I have no idea, however, that Tyler would have nominated you as long as Webster governs him, which is the common belief. Benton says that we will have to wait patiently until the expiration of Tyler's term. He thinks the Democrats will have from eighty to one hundred majority in the next Congress. From present appearances Van Buren will be the Democratic candidate; Benton is openly and decidedly for him. He takes well with the people where he has been; he is strong in the north, and unites more southern interests than any other northern man, or perhaps any man from the south.

The House has given the Territories the 5th, 6th, and the 7th of July, and we will endeavor to have our business prepared. With a bankrupt treasury we have but little to hope for as to appropriations. I think I shall get two hundred thousand acres of land for a harbor at Milwaukee and perhaps an appropriation in land for the other points. I do not promise myself much. You have never seen such a body of men convened as the present members of the House of Representatives, bitter and vindictive as they can be towards each other, and but little of that courtesy necessary in legislative bodies, the Whigs divided and cut to pieces among themselves, many of them exceedingly hostile to Tyler; and to tell you my opinion, there appears to be with the Heads of the Departments a great deficiency of practical knowledge to enable them to administer the Government. I have been for six months using all the means in my power to get the money

appropriated last March a year ago sent to the Territory, and after having made me promises time and again I have introduced a resolution this day calling on the Secretary of the Treasury for a report of his reasons for not sending the money to the Territory. I believe they were afraid of Field (Secretary of Wisconsin Territory, 1841-'3), and if that was the case they ought to have removed him from office. He arrived here today, and it appears that he and Doty are far from being friends. Field says that Doty is now endeavoring to form a party among the Democrats.

AUGUST 12, 1842. Your esteemed favor of the 10th ult. I would have answered at an earlier date but for the constant pressure of Territorial matters. Immediately after the receipt of your letter Augustus and myself called on Wise, and he promptly attended to your claim for surveying. As we had both done everything we could to get your money without success, we thought as Wise was considered all powerful with the President that he could do more by himself than united with us. He informed us that the Commissioner of the General Land Office would give such instruction as would enable you to obtain your just demands.

A bill making appropriations (\$86,000) for harbors at Milwaukee, Southport, and Racine, and for a lighthouse at Southport, has passed the House. I had the assistance of several of the Whigs who supported the bill. It was a close contested fight from ten o'clock until three in the afternoon. The fate of my bill in the Senate is extremely doubtful. Governor Woodbridge, of Michigan, Chairman of the Committee on Commerce, had charge of the subject. I fear he dislikes to see me succeed in a measure calculated to help my future standing in Wisconsin. The general opinion of the members is in favor of one harbor on our Lake border. In the present state of the treasury they are afraid of expending money on three points. I have, however, redeemed my pledge to my constituents on the Lake border and, let the Senate do as they may, I can meet my fellow citizens full in the face, for my best energies were brought into requisition. . . . The Clay party have majorities in both Houses. I think they will never succeed in electing Mr. Clay President, and from present appearances many of them have been brought to that conclusion. Augustus is still in delicate health. He sustained himself finely in the debate on the boundary question between Missouri and Iowa. He is a good speaker.

DECEMBER 15, 1843. The addresses of Col. Benton and Mr. Crittenden on the death of my lamented brother (Lewis F. Linn*) were worthy of the Senators who spoke with great feeling and eloquence. [They are reported in Benton's "Thirty Years' View," Chapter 116, Vol. II, pp. 485-'7.]

. . . I am anxious to know what course our friends on the Lake border may take on the subject of harbors. Milwaukee will be embraced in the general estimates made by the Topographical Bureau. I feel desir-

*They were children of the same mother, Nancy Ann Hunter.—Iowa His. Record, II, 258-264.

ous to do all the good I can for the people of the Territory who have so generously supported me.

XXV.

DIXON, ILL., Nov. 12, 1858.

Hon. George W. Jones, Dubuque, Iowa:

Your two letters would have been answered ere this but for my bad health.

On the subject of the extension of the Illinois Railroad from Galena to Dunleith, your amendment to the Douglas bill was entirely yours, in which your colleague and myself entirely agree with you. Your immediate constituents in Dubuque and the counties in both the States of Iowa and Wisconsin and the then Territory of Minnesota bordering on the Mississippi were all directly interested in your amendment. Had the terminus been at Galena, it would have deprived the people of those counties of many advantages that they now have at the terminus at Dunleith. Yours was a liberal and enlarged policy. As my son was your colleague it is not perhaps proper for me to say more on this subject.

On the subject of Capt. Clark's having furnished beef for the Black Hawk war I know nothing. The White Oak Springs was considered a place of safety, and although within my command they were so remote from me that I knew nothing of their matters. My attention was entirely directed to the more exposed frontiers.

. . . If you hear anything from Augustus (then U. S. Minister to Spain) let us hear the news; we feel much interest in hearing from him.

Mrs. Dodge unites in much love to Mrs. Jones, Fanny Clarke, and your family.

Affectionately your friend and obt. servant,

HENRY DODGE.

THE EDITOR returned a few days since, having visited Washington, Jefferson and Henry counties for the first time. In these counties are to be found as fine bodies of good farming land as in any portion of the whole west, and although they have settled rapidly since the Indian title was extinguished, there are many handsome localities open to settlement. If the farmers on the rocky and unproductive hills of the old states were not blind to their own interests, these beautiful prairies would soon blossom as the rose.—*Bloomington Herald, March 10, 1843.*

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