

GROS VENTRE, PIEGAN, BLOOD, BLACKFEET, AND RIVER
CROW INDIANS, IN MONTANA.

JANUARY 24, 1888.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state
of the Union and ordered to be printed.

Mr. HARE, from the Committee on Indian Affairs, submitted the fol-
lowing

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 1956.]

The Committee on Indian Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 1956) to ratify and confirm an agreement with the Gros Ventre, Piegan, Blood, Blackfeet, and River Crow Indians, in Montana, respectfully report:

That they have given the same a full and careful consideration, and unanimously recommend the passage of the same, with the following amendments: First, strike out the word "Joseph" where it appears in line 1, page 1, and insert the word "John" in lieu thereof. Second, strike out the word "of" in line 17, page 3, and insert the word "or" in lieu thereof.

On the 15th day of April, A. D. 1874, Congress passed an act providing for hunting-grounds for the several tribes of Indians mentioned in this bill, and the immense territory occupied in common by them was set apart for that purpose. At that time this region was noted for buffalo and other game, which have now become practically extinct, and no longer furnish a subsistence for these tribes. For a long time it has been evident that it was the duty of the Government to permanently settle such of these tribes as still roam over this tract, and to assist them to become self-supporting by other means than the chase.

Without a treaty obligation these tribes, consisting of 2,026 at the Blackfeet Agency, 1,650 at the Fort Belknap Agency, and 2,914 at the Fort Peck Agency, have continuously since 1874, and long prior thereto, been provided for and maintained by the Government, and will continue indefinitely to be a charge upon the Government unless some provision is made for their future support. More than half the amount required to be appropriated under the provisions of this bill is annually given as an absolute gratuity to these Indians. In view of these facts Congress, on the 15th of May, A. D. 1886, incorporated a clause in the Indian appropriation act to enable the Secretary of the Interior to negotiate with the various bands or tribes of Indians in northern Montana for a reduction of their reservations (see 24 Stat. at Large, p. 44).

Pursuant to this authority, John V. Wright, Jared W. Daniel, and Charles F. Larrabee were duly appointed commissioners, and personally conducted the negotiations which resulted in an agreement whereby

over 17,500,000 acres of the large reservation now occupied by these Indians are ceded to the United States. The agreement was concurred in by their chiefs, head-men, and principal men, embracing a majority of the male adult Indians occupying said reservation. This commission, in their report of February 11, 1887, strongly urge the ratification by Congress of the agreement (see House Ex. Doc. No. 63, p. 12, Fiftieth Congress).

The substance of the agreement and pertinent observations concerning the same are so well stated in a communication of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the honorable Secretary of the Interior that your committee have inclosed the same herein. It is as follows:

Briefly stated, the agreement concluded with the various bands or tribes occupying the Great Blackfeet Reservation, in northern Montana, provides for the cession to the United States of by far the greater part of that vast reservation lying along the international boundary and extending east to the Dakota line and west to the summit of the Rocky Mountains, with the Missouri and Marias Rivers and Birch Creek for its southern boundary, estimated to contain 33,830 square miles, or 21,651,000 acres—an area three times as large as that of Maryland, larger than the State of Indiana, almost as great as that of South Carolina, and greater than the New England States, leaving out the State of Maine.

According to the report of the Commission, the territory ceded to the United States under the agreement embraces an area of about 17,500,000 acres—more than three-fifths of the entire reservation.

The remaining unceded lands are divided into three separate reservations—one for the Indians now attached to the Fort Peck Agency, one for the Indians attached to the Fort Belknap Agency, and the third for the Indians attached to the Blackfeet Agency.

It might be proper to state here that the Great Blackfeet Reservation is at present claimed and held in common by the Indians of the three above-named agencies, no division of the territory ever having been made by competent authority; hence the negotiations were conducted alike with all, and but one agreement was executed with the several bands.

The three separate tracts reserved by the Indians for their future homes are situated as follows: The Fort Peck Reservation, on the Missouri River, north side, from Porcupine Creek to the Big Muddy, and extending north 40 miles. The Fort Belknap, on Milk River, south side, from the mouth of Snake Creek to the mouth of People's Creek, and extending south to the summit of the Little Rockies. The Blackfeet, in the extreme western part of the present reservation, extending from the Cut Bank to the summit of the Rocky Mountains, and from Birch Creek to the British Possessions.

The descriptions given are only general; for a more particular definition of the respective boundaries reference should be had to the agreement.

The tribes or bands for whom the several separate reservations are made retain no interest whatsoever in any reservation other than the one set apart for their separate use and occupation respectively.

The compensation agreed upon for the cession of their surplus lands is as follows: For the Indians of the Fort Peck Agency, \$165,000 annually for ten years; for the Indians of Fort Belknap Agency, \$115,000 annually for ten years, and for the Indians of the Blackfeet Agency, \$150,000 annually for the same period, the money to be expended for the purchase of cows, bulls, and other stock, goods, clothing, subsistence, agricultural and mechanical implements; in providing employés; in the education of Indian children; in procuring medicine and medical attendance; in the care and support of the aged, sick, and infirm, and helpless orphans of said Indians; in the erection of such new agency and school buildings, mills, blacksmith, carpenter, and wagon shops as may be necessary; in assisting the Indians to build houses and inclose their farms, and in any other respect to promote their civilization, comfort, and improvement.

It is also agreed that in the employment of farmers, artisans, and laborers preference shall in all cases be given to Indians residing on the reservation who are found to be well qualified for such employment.

The sale, exchange, or slaughtering of cattle issued to the Indians for breeding purposes, or their increase, except by consent of the agent in charge, is prohibited, but the Commissioner of Indian Affairs may remove such restriction.

It is further agreed that whenever, in the opinion of the President, the yearly installments of \$165,000, \$115,000, and \$150,000 shall be more than is required to be expended in any one year in carrying out the stipulations of the agreement, so much

thereof as may be in excess of the requirement shall be placed in the Treasury to the credit of the Indians, and expended in continuing the benefits of the agreement after the ten years during which the installments are to run shall have expired.

In the distribution of cattle and other stock, goods, clothing, subsistence, and agricultural implements preference is to be given to Indians who endeavor by honest labor to support themselves, and especially to those who in good faith undertake the cultivation of the soil or the raising of stock as a means of livelihood. Suitable provision is made for the protection of Indians whose homes fall within the ceded territory and for the survey and marking of the outboundaries of the diminished reservations, the cost of such survey to be paid for out of the first installments appropriated.

Right of way is secured for railroads, wagon-roads, and telegraph lines, whenever, in the opinion of the President, the public interests require their construction through either of the three separate reservations.

It is the deliberate judgment of the Commissioners that these Indians are not as yet prepared to take lands in severalty, and they are equally positive that even if they were so prepared the country occupied by them is wholly unsuited for that experiment.

As the subject is one of special interest, in view of the policy of the Government to allot lands in severalty to Indians whenever and wherever practicable, I quote the following from their report:

"Neither of these bands are as yet prepared to take lands in severalty. Indeed, the country occupied by them is not suitable for that experiment. It is in no sense a good agricultural country, and it would be a very difficult matter, if not impossible, for a white man to make a living there if confined strictly to the cultivation of the soil.

"Montana, aside from its mineral resources, is essentially a stock-raising country, the northern portion of it especially being but poorly adapted to any thing else; hence it is that stock-raising has become the principal industry of the people. The frequent failure of crops, owing to the aridity of the soil, renders farming not only unprofitable, but uncertain as a means of support; therefore, if the Indians in northern Montana are ever to become self-supporting, they must follow the pursuits which the whites by long experience have found the country best adapted to—cattle, sheep, and horse raising. This need not, and should not, be to the entire exclusion of farming, but it should become their chief industry and dependence.

"It can be said positively that the Fort Peck Indians can never become self-supporting where they now are through the cultivation of the soil alone; but there can be no doubt that with proper encouragement they would soon reach that position as stock-growers. Stock-herding is suited to their tastes; they are willing to work, and realize the necessity of doing for themselves; and it is but right and just that their efforts should be encouraged and directed in a way that will be most likely to advance their civilization and happiness. Furthermore, it is absolutely certain that unless they have cattle given them and become stock-raisers the Government will be obliged to support them for all time or allow them to starve.

"Holding to these views, we have made provision in the agreement with them to enable them to become self-supporting as a pastoral people. The reservation set apart for them is ample, but not too large, and was selected with that end in view. The consideration agreed upon for the cession of their surplus lands will be sufficient to provide them with cattle, sheep, and other stock for a successful start in that direction, and to subsist and otherwise care for them, until they are able to support themselves without aid from the Government. * * *

"The promise of stock cattle was the principal inducement which led to the cession of the vast territory relinquished to the Government. * * *

"What has been said in regard to the policy to be pursued with the Fort Peck Indians is equally true in respect of the Fort Belknap and Blackfeet Agency Indians. They must be encouraged in stock-raising as well as in agricultural pursuits. They never can become self-supporting in any other way."

There are not less than 2,300 Sioux and about 1,100 Assinaboines at the Fort Peck Agency for whom the reservation on the Missouri between Porcupine Creek and the Muddy was set apart. The question of the advisability and practicability of removing the Sioux to the Great Sioux Reservation in Dakota was thoroughly considered by the Commissioners, and the decision reached that it was not advisable to make any attempt in that direction. The Indians themselves were firmly opposed to such change of residence, and manifested a good deal of surprise and uneasiness at the mere suggestion of it by the Commissioners. They claim equal rights with the other Indians in the Great Blackfeet Reservation, which claim was not disputed by either of the other bands. The Government placed them there nearly a quarter of a century ago, and by long residence they have become greatly attached to the country, and could not be easily persuaded to abandon it.

The Sioux are settled in the immediate vicinity of the agency, and the Assinaboines mainly at Wolf Point, about 20 miles west, on Wolf Creek.

The reservation for these two bands was selected with special regard to convenience, utility, and capacity for stock-raising, for, as has already been said, the promise of stock cattle was the principal inducement with all the tribes or bands which led to the cession of the vast territory ceded by them to the Government.

The Commissioners report that the agreement with the Fort Peck Indians was satisfactory alike to the Indians and their friends present during the progress of the negotiations, and they express the belief that if strictly carried out the Indians will require no further aid from the Government.

The Fort Belknap Agency Indians were unwilling to remove either to Fort Peck or any other distant point, but consented unanimously to remove from their present locality near Fort Assinaboine to the reservation selected for them east of Snake Creek and between Milk River and the Little Rockies. The Commissioners describe the new selection as affording the best lands for agricultural purposes in all that region of country. It is well watered, they say, and susceptible of irrigation at a small cost. Besides, it is admirably adapted to stock-raising. Timber is plenty for needed agency buildings and Indian houses.

They refer to the proximity of the present habitation of the Indians, to the military post of Fort Assinaboine, and the baneful influence of such close contact upon the health and morals both of the garrison and Indians. This evil, in the opinion of the Commissioners, can only be remedied by removing the Indians further from the post as in the agreement provided. There are about 1,700 Indians at Fort Belknap Agency—Assinaboines and Gros Ventres, the latter only slightly outnumbering the former.

The Indians of the Blackfeet Agency, the last visited, appear to have been more exacting in their demands than any of the other Indians. The Commissioners observe that it was very evident from the beginning of the negotiations that they had been tampered with by designing white men whom they found at the agency, and who hoped to gain some advantage to themselves in one way or another. Their chiefs complained of ill-usage and bad faith on the part of the Government in times past, and the negotiations were considerably delayed by their unreasonable and persistent demands.

Finally, however, they consented to the agreement as already executed by the Indians of the other two agencies, and selected the reservation heretofore described.

In explanation of the apparent disproportion in the sums agreed upon as compensation for the ceded territory, between the Indians of this and the other two agencies, the Commissioners state that the needs of the Blackfeet Indians are proportionally greater than the others, and there are from 500 to 1,000 Indians on the other side of the international line who may properly be regarded as belonging to the Blackfeet Agency, and are likely sooner or later to return to the agency; and, furthermore, they believe that they (the Blackfeet Agency Indians) have the most ancient claim to the ceded territory, having occupied it as far back as their history is known.

In closing their report upon the agreement with the Indians of the Great Blackfeet Reservation, the Commissioners observe as follows:

“What has been said in regard to the policy to be pursued with the Fort Peck Indians is equally true in respect of the Fort Belknap and Blackfeet Agency Indians.

“They must be encouraged in stock-raising as well as in agricultural pursuits. They can never become self-supporting in any other way. * * *

“The execution of the agreement with the Piegans, Bloods, and Blackfeet concludes our labors with the Indians in northern Montana. * * *

“We have made every possible effort looking to the conclusion of this work in time to get it before Congress, if it should so please the Department, during the present session, and we trust that it is not yet too late. No human foresight could have accomplished more. We have traveled night and day in open vehicles during a period of cold weather which will be memorable in the history of Montana, and without a day's delay that could possibly have been avoided.” (House Ex. Doc. No. 63, Fiftieth Congress, p. 4.)

Your committee further state that the honorable Secretary of the Interior, in a communication to the President dated December 30, 1887, indorses the action of the commissioners in the following language:

By these negotiations a very large area of land now in state of reservation for Indian purposes, being the excess of quantity needed for the actual use of the tribes and bands for whom it has been held in reservation, is placed at the disposal of the United States so that it may be opened to settlement in such manner as Congress in its wisdom may direct. * * * When these negotiations shall have been fully ratified they will remove some serious hindrances to the contentment, the permanent settlement, and the more rapid advancement in civilization of the tribes and bands who are parties thereto. The money necessary to be appropriated for their support and to assist them forward in the ways of civilization will not be, as heretofore, so largely a gratuity from the Government, but will go to them by judicious expenditures as consid-

eration for valuable rights and claims which they have ceded and relinquished to the Government.

For these and other like reasons I concur in the recommendation of the Commissioner that the agreements be speedily ratified. (House Ex. Doc. No. 63, p. 3, Fiftieth Congress.)

Your committee, after a full investigation, indorse what has been said in the foregoing extracts, and join in the recommendation of a speedy ratification of said agreement. It will result in throwing open to settlement and occupation over 17,500,000 acres of land, and, in our opinion, is the best possible means whereby these Indians will become self-supporting.

H. Rep. 104—2