

RESERVATION OF THE TURTLE MOUNTAIN BAND OF CHIP-
PEWA INDIANS.

MARCH 4, 1890.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of
the Union and ordered to be printed.

Mr. GIFFORD, from the Committee on Indian Affairs, submitted the
following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 660.]

The Committee on Indian Affairs, to whom was referred bill No. 660 providing for the appointment of a commission to negotiate with the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa Indians for the cession of their reservation in Rolette County, State of North Dakota, beg leave to report the same and recommend that it do pass, with amendments.

In support of this recommendation the committee submit the following:

First, attention is called to the report of the Secretary of the Interior for the year ending June 30, 1888.

After reciting the history of the Turtle Mountain Indians and the legislative and executive action taken during the past few years in respect of said Indians, the Secretary says:

I therefore earnestly urge upon Congress an early and careful consideration of the affairs and condition of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Indians, and prompt measures to provide for the removal of such of them as are entitled to governmental care to the White Earth or the Red Lake Reservation, and their support and civilization in such new homes. It is, in my opinion, inexpedient to leave any body of unreclaimed Indians near the border. And it is inhumane and unwise to suffer any to remain beyond the influences of reclamation anywhere. Special reasons in the circumstances of these people add much to the general sanction of these principles.

The situation has become more complicated and embarrassed since the date of the honorable Secretary's report, owing mainly to the attempted enforcement of taxation among the non-reservation Indians by the county authorities, and at times the relations between the half-breeds and whites have been so strained as to seriously threaten the peace of the community. For two or three years the question of taxation has been a subject of contention between the county authorities and the half-breeds and Indians; the latter claiming that they were not subject to taxation and were too poor to pay taxes, while the authorities have insisted that they were subject to taxation and must bear the burden in equal proportion with white settlers.

Not very long ago the Indians forcibly seized and carried away a number of cattle and ponies that had been distrained by the county officials for delinquent taxes, and defied the authorities to arrest them; whereupon the county commissioners asked for United States troops to protect the lives and property of settlers and to aid them in the execution of the laws.

The whites formed a cavalry company to protect themselves and the Indians both on and off the reservation were in a high state of excitement.

Upon the suggestion of the Indian Bureau the Department requested the governor of Dakota to use his influence to procure a suspension of action by the county authorities of Rolette County in the matter of Indian taxation in said county.

The discontent and hostility of feeling on the part of the non-reservation Indians had its effect on the reservation Indians, and twice within the past year, at the request of the agent, this office has been obliged to call for military aid to protect the Government property and preserve the peace.

On one occasion last winter the Indians threatened to tie the farmer in charge and put him off the reservation unless he would issue rations to them at their dictation, and indiscriminately, whether entitled to aid or not. The troops arrived at midnight and were on the ground when the rations were issued, thereby preventing the execution of the threat which the farmer believes would surely have been carried out but for their presence.

In reporting the outcome of this affair the farmer said :

There is one other element of danger remaining, and that is the question of taxes. The taxes due by many of the mixed bloods for 1886 remain uncollected, and the county officers are preparing to collect them, and I am sure there will be serious trouble, involving all the mixed bloods both on and off the reservation. Although the county do not claim taxes from residents of the reserve, still there are many residing here now who have moved in since the tax was levied and have brought the chattels on which taxes are assessed with them. At any rate they are pledged to each to help resist the officers.

More recently (in November) Agent Cramsie, having returned from a visit to the Turtle Mountain Reservation, reported that he had become satisfied that he would be unable to control the Indians on the reservation and in its vicinity without military assistance, since they had successfully defied the local civil authorities; and he therefore asked and recommended that troops be stationed on the reservation and kept there until the troubles and disturbances were permanently settled.

In reporting the matter to the Department (November 21, 1889), the Indian Office observed as follows:

The constantly recurring disturbances in the Turtle Mountain country, both on and off the reservation, have caused no little apprehension to this office, and it has long been felt that a military force, permanently stationed on or near the reservation, would sooner or later be required to prevent serious conflict between the Indians, the Canadians, half-breeds, and the white settlers. The repeated attempts by the local civil authorities to collect taxes from the non-reservation Indians, who are mainly half-breeds, and the distraining of their cattle in default of payment, has, as the Department knows, been a most fruitful source of disturbance, and more than once has threatened direful consequences, which have only been averted, as would seem, by the suspension or non-enforcement of the tax. The reservation Indians, especially, have long been chafing under what they claim was an act of injustice to them—the restoration of the lands claimed by them north and west of Devil's Lake to the public domain without compensating them therefor. This, added to the tax question, has made them sensitive and sometimes extremely lawless, as in the case now reported. It is also believed that a large number of Indians from Canada come over to share in every issuance of food made at that point, where they have no claims upon this Government for support.

In view of the facts thus briefly set forth, I have the honor to recommend that the Secretary of War be requested to issue the necessary orders for the sending of a small military force to the Turtle Mountain Reservation to meet the present emergency, and it is suggested that he be further requested to consider the question of the propriety and advisability of stationing a small military force, in charge of a commissioned officer, permanently on the Turtle Mountain Reservation or somewhere in its immediate vicinity.

E. W. Brenner, the farmer in charge of the reservation, under date of August 23, 1889, makes the following statement in his report to the Indian Office:

The reservation is located in Rolette County, Dak., in township 162 north, range 70 west, and in township 162 north, range 71 west, and contains 46,800 acres, divided into farming, timber, and grazing lands.

The census finds 82 families of full bloods, numbering 264, and 229 families of mixed bloods, numbering 1,076—total, 1,380; showing a decrease of full bloods of 82, and an increase of mixed bloods of 56.

The population is here and away, and it was difficult to make an accurate census, and the number as given is liable to an increase, particularly by the return of the full bloods. Many are away without passes, and whether they will return is not known. The mixed bloods have increased 56, although some have sold their improvements and gone away.

There is much talk about the hard fare of these people, but they keep a-coming all the same, and such as go away leave the better off for their residence here. The question who is a Turtle Mountain Indian needs acute discrimination to decide.

These people are very anxious to have the Government settle their affairs and define their status, and in consequence make but few improvements. It seems also to be understood that Canadian half-breeds can not secure lands, either as Indians or citizens, which does injury to some good and thrifty men. The cry along the line is, let the Government settle our affairs so that we may know who and what we are.

Your committee respectfully suggest that the negotiations, if authorized, should be had with the Indians rightfully belonging on the Turtle Mountain Reservation for the cession and relinquishment to the United States of whatever right, title, or interest they may have in said reservation, and their removal to the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota.

A careful census of the band should be first taken, in order to exclude the Canadian Indians and half-breeds, and all others not entitled to the care of this Government and to participation in the negotiations, and for the further purpose of ascertaining how many it will be necessary to provide for at White Earth in land, etc. This could be done by the commissioners who may be appointed to conduct the negotiations and as a preliminary step to the negotiations. Negotiations should then be had with the Chippewas in Minnesota to obtain their consent to the settlement and consolidation of the Turtle Mountain Indians on the White Earth Reservation.

The money received by the Turtle Mountain Indians for the relinquishment of their rights in their reservation in North Dakota should be consolidated with the funds of the Minnesota Chippewas, and the Turtle Mountain Indians who settle at White Earth should be admitted to a full share in the common consolidated fund.

Before the funds are consolidated, however, the Government should reimburse itself for whatever money may be expended in the removal to White Earth.

Your committee recommend the adoption of the following amendments: Add after the word "consent" in line 11 the words "if necessary." Strike out the word "ten" in line 19, page 2, and insert "five" in lieu thereof.