



The Letter Books of Benjamin Harding (Part I)

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Article Summary: Harding's 1846-1848 business correspondence includes requests for items that he wanted to offer for sale in his capacity as Indian trader at the Great Nemahaw Agency. He frequently mentions the going prices for stock items and enumerates the hides, skins, and cash that he has sent to his employer, Joseph Robidoux.

Editor's Note: [Part II](#) of this article contains additional Harding letters.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Benjamin Harding, Joseph Robidoux, W E Rucker, Samuel M Irvin, Francis Irvin, William Hamilton, White Cloud, Harvey W Forman, Brichnell, J Deroir

Indigenous Peoples Mentioned: Iowas, Sacs, Foxes

Place Names: Great Nemahaw Agency (near present-day Highland, Kansas)

Photographs/Images: Harding and his wife Emily with their family on their fiftieth wedding anniversary; Harding home in Wathena, Kansas, built in 1858

THE LETTER BOOKS OF BENJAMIN HARDING

(PART 1)

BY HOOVER H. JORDAN

THE letters which form the bulk of the ensuing article are from the hand of Benjamin Harding, best known as a senator in the First Free State Legislature of the Kansas Territory. In his varied capacities of state senator, Indian trader, schoolmaster, soldier, Free-State exponent, farmer, real-estate dealer, and public official, he played an important part in the history of northeast Kansas, especially Doniphan County, in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Harding was born in Otsego County, New York, November 25, 1816, the son of Roswell Harding, a farmer of good education and of some substance in his community. He received the usual district-school education but supplemented this by his own studies so that in 1836 when he struck out on his own, he became a school teacher as well as a farmer. From Cortland County, where he began his career, he drifted south through eastern and southern Pennsylvania, teaching and farming, until 1844 when he decided to go west and accordingly took boat down the Ohio and up the Missouri. He settled first in Chariton County but within two years had moved to St. Joseph, which, though a settlement of only about a thousand inhabitants, was one of the few villages of importance west of St. Louis. In the year Harding arrived, St. Joseph had just been selected as the county seat of Buchanan County.

There Harding presented himself to Ben Holladay, later a guiding-spirit of the mail-coach routes to the West, who gave him a kindly greeting. Holladay insisted that

Hoover H. Jordan is professor of English at Michigan State Normal College, Ypsilanti, Michigan.

money might be made in trade with the Indians living across the Missouri River and arranged for Harding to make a trip of inspection. These lands, it will be remembered, were occupied almost solely at this time by Indians, who had been allotted lands by the Government and on their reservations received financial support from Washington as wards of the Government.

Accordingly, on August 15, 1846, Harding crossed the Missouri into Indian territory and travelled twenty-five miles to the Great Nemahaw (or Nemaha) Agency with Major W. E. Rucker, who had been appointed subagent for the Iowa, Sac, and Fox Indians. The circumstances in that county so appealed to Harding that in 1847 he became the Indian trader at Great Nemahaw for Joseph Robidoux, the man most instrumental in founding St. Joseph. With his newly won bride Harding remained at this post during 1847 and the greater part of 1848, when Robidoux sold the business.

Though the subsequent career of Harding is not the subject of this article, it may not be amiss to observe that his later activities were mainly confined to this area between Great Nemahaw and St. Joseph. There he farmed, taught school, and traded with the Indians. His home he finally located across the Missouri from St. Joseph and so became the founder of the town of Wathena, where his cement-block house is still standing a few yards from Route 36. His participation in the border troubles of the 1850's can most easily be traced in the voluminous study for the 34th Congress, House of Representatives, 1856, *Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Investigate the Troubles in Kansas*. He attended the Free-State convention at Topeka in March 1857, and later that year was elected senator to the First Free State Legislature. After serving for two trying years in this capacity, he withdrew from politics except for his election as Register of Deeds for Doniphan County during the Civil War. In the war he served as captain for Company K, Ninth Regiment, of the Kansas State Militia. The last forty years of his life were spent quietly at Wathena mainly in farming, but he was always a man of many interests. He was, for instance, active in furthering the interests of the St. Joseph and Western railroad, which brought its rails to Wathena in the summer of 1860, and served for some years

as a station agent for that road. He was also a director of the Kansas State Historical Society. He died at Wathena in 1904. It is perhaps of interest that his daughter Clara Jordan is still living at the age of 104 as these remarks are being written.

The Great Nemahaw Sub Agency was situated in a log cabin near the present site of Highland, Kansas. In Harding's words it was "but a few rods" from the fine stone and brick mission building erected by the Presbyterian Church for ministering to the Iowa, Sac, and Fox Indians. This mission had been founded in 1837 by the Rev. Samuel M. Irvin and his wife, who were soon joined by the Rev. William Hamilton and his wife. These sincere and pious missionaries, often mentioned in the ensuing letters, worked for sixteen years together, at first in a log cabin but after 1845 in the fine building which in a restored condition can still be seen near Highland. Here they brought in 1843 a printing press from which they issued some of the first volumes in Kansas, including *An Ioway Grammar, Illustrating the Principles of the Language Used by the Ioway, Otoe and Missouri Indians* (1848). They also wrote the article on the Iowa and Sac Indians for Henry Schoolcraft's famous volume on the Indian tribes of the United States (1853). Hamilton left the mission to go to Bellevue, Nebraska, in 1853, but Irvin remained until the mission closed in 1863.

In the estimation of these men and of the reports to the Indian Commissioner by Major W. P. Richardson, the Indian subagent, the Iowas, led by White Cloud, were the most degraded of the three main tribes of the area. The Sacs and Foxes were generally regarded as more provident, less given to drunkenness, and prouder; they kept their distance from Irvin and Hamilton, who even in their most sanguine moments wondered how effective their efforts were in bettering any Indians. However, as will be seen in the subsequent letters, Harding was often as disgusted by the Sacs and Foxes as by the Iowas. To aid these tribes, the Government hired Francis Irvin to assist the Iowas with their crops, mainly corn, and Harvey W. Forman to help the Sacs and Foxes. Estimates by Irvin and Schoolcraft would place the number of Indians in these years at about four hundred Iowas, thirteen hundred Sacs, and seven hundred Foxes.

Obviously the lot of a serious trader with these improvident, drunken, and fighting Indians was not a happy one, and Harding was a serious trader. Though blessed with a sense of humor that peeps out even in these business letters, he was a quiet man who disliked frivolity and sternly disciplined himself and his family. He never smoked or chewed tobacco and abstained from alcoholic beverages except for medicinal purposes. Here, as in his later life, he typifies the thoughtful citizen of a democracy, aware of his responsibilities to his country, and eager to establish a decent, orderly life on the frontier. His letters, therefore, reveal no agent bent on purveying whiskey for the corruption of the Indian, but rather a conscientious man, alive to his duty to his employer, concerned over operating a business under adverse circumstances, and desirous of protecting the Indian from eternal improvidence and drunkenness.

The letters begin about three months after Harding's departure for the frontier and are gathered in two letter books, the first hopefully inscribed "Life Let Us Cherish," the second dolefully entitled "Contention and strife make uneasy our lives." All the letters bear the address of the Great Nemahaw Sub Agency and are inscribed to Joseph Robidoux, unless otherwise noted. F. and M. Robidoux are Joseph's brothers Francis and Michel (which Harding often spells "Mitchell"); reference is also made in the letters to Joseph's son, who bears the same name as his father.

April 23/47

Sir. I have talked with Mr Forman about a team to haul the trading house & find that we can have a team at almost any time. When you can send hands up I will attend to it. Roy tells me that he thinks the woman who occupied the house last season will not give it up without difficulty. If so I wish you to instruct me what to do in the case. I think the bacon which was put up for me the other day was left by mistake at St Joseph but I can get along without it until your bacon comes from Grand River if it comes soon. If you have or can get a few gallons of lard & send it conveniently when you send the bacon I wish you would do it and charge the same to my private account.

April 30th 1847

Dr Sir. Yours of the 26th inst was received day before yesterday. A committee of the Iowa's consisting of nearly

the whole tribe waited on me three or four days ago and begged hard for goods on credit which I positively refused, when they pretended to get very angry. I do not trust them at all except for blankets etc to bury their dead which they must have. With the lard and bacon please send me a bed rope.

May 16

Dr Sir. We arrived at home on Saturday evening though not without getting thoroughly wet.

Mr. Irvin's team is going down to day by which I send you the following articles, viz—7 Otter, 9 Coon, 1 Fox, 3 Mink skins 1 hide & 23 pair mocasins—4¾ lbs Deer Skins.

We are often in want of wrapping paper & twine. I presume it is needless to remind you that we need scales for weighing. Those that I have were borrowed of Geffrey, and he has requested me to send them to him by the first opportunity. I think two or three boxes of family soap could be disposed of here. At any rate I shall have to buy for our own use after a short time & it is occasionally called for. Do not forget to have those things sent which I left at J C Robidoux & request him to send me a *first rate* razor and brush.

We shall want some fifteen pounds or more of cotton batting for our use before winter & if you think it worth while you can purchase 30 or 40 pounds in St Louis the remainder of it I can sell here. Otherwise I can get what we shall want at St Joseph.

I forgot to enquire when down what was done with the *beeswax* which I sent by Bushnell. Please inform me.

May 18

Dr Sir. I have sold all my Gun caps & more would have been taken if I had had them. Please send me some by Mr. Irvin if it should be too late to send them by the wagon.

May 21/1847

Dr Sir. I have this day received the invoice of goods sent by Mr. Wells.

On looking over the bill I find some of the articles put down at higher prices than they *ought* to have cost, but perhaps they are put at the retail prices if so I wish you would inform me. Powder is put at 40c per pound. A part of it I expect to sell Mr Rucker who will be unwilling to give me more than 7½ or 8 dollars per keg since he knows he can purchase for that or less. Other things are put down

too at higher prices than they *ought* to have cost. If they did cost *that* you paid too much. If not I would like to know what they did cost that I may know how to sell them.

May 22/47

Dr Sir. Yours written day before yesterday was handed me this morning & right glad was I to find you again reiterating the request respecting the credit to the Ioways, since it has in a manner relieved us from rather an unpleasant dilemma. White Cloud & Ash mon ya were here yesterday but expressed very little disposition to go hunting. They objected to taking the hoes because they said they could not divide them without causing dissension in the tribe in consequence of the small number. The greater part of the axes are of a kind which they never use consequently they can be of no use to them. The Powder Lead Butcher Knives & some flour they would be very glad to get hold of but you may rest assured they will *not* get them until they are found ready for going on their hunt.

Until the receipt of yours this morning Maj Rucker considered himself in *honor bound* to take the goods of you but since he finds that you are willing to keep them he now feels at liberty to refuse them to the Indians unless they should actually go hunting, in which case they will be here ready for them.

The Indians in council last winter requested that five hundred dollars of their annuities should be appropriated to the support of a blacksmith for two months to repair their guns etc & to purchase axes & hoes & the necessaries for hunting Buffaloes. An engagement was partially made with a smith which was approved when he was informed of it & he agreed to come last monday to go to work but he has failed to come, though Maj Rucker will employ another as soon as he can find a good one who is willing to come. Therefore the iron files etc will be required. The powder etc were asked expressly for the buffalo hunt & he will not feel at liberty to give them until they are actually ready to go.

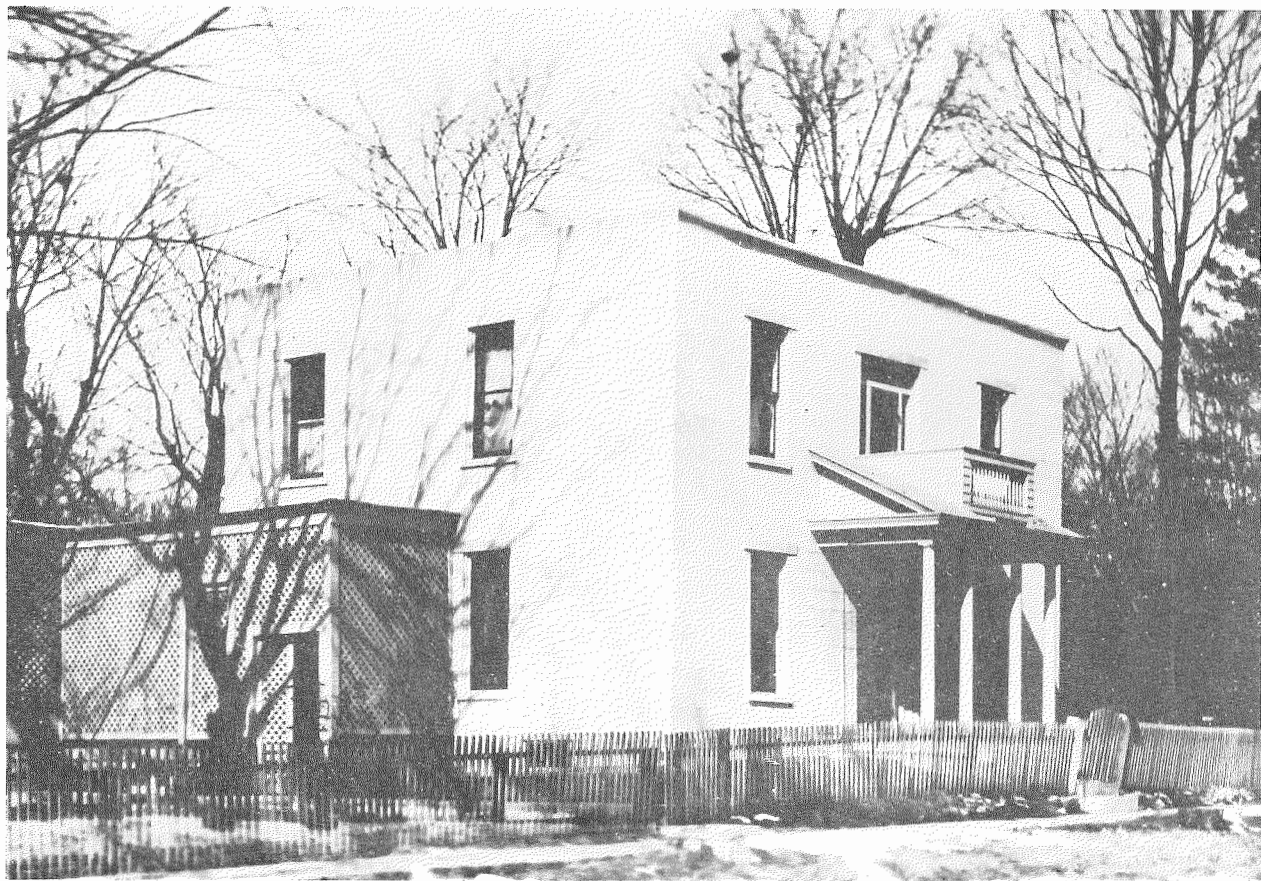
Maj Rucker will go to St Joseph to-morrow or next day and you will probably see him. I expect he will be the bearer of this.

May 24

Dear Sir. Mr Roy tells me that he is going to leave here in consequence of some difficulty which he says he has had with Maj Rucker the particulars of which I know nothing about.



Benjamin Harding and his wife Emily on the occasion of their fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1897. Their ten children surround them.



Home of Benjamin Harding at Wathena, Kansas, built in 1858.

He also offers to sell his improvement to me or you.

He says that he owes you fifty dollars and you may have his place if you will cancel the debt. There is some six or eight acres improved a part of which is planted with corn and sown with oats. It is a convenient place for a trading house & his house would answer for the trading room, but you have bought property enough in the Indian Country to know how to value it. He requested me to write to you upon the subject & state whether it would suit me. It certainly would suit me and so would almost any other arrangement that would make situation comfortable & enable me to live in peace & enjoy the good will of my *neighbors* and *all* with whom I am *concerned*.

May 24

The Ioways started yesterday to visit the Mississippi Sacs and I understand they intend to spend a month or more visiting the Sacs & Foxes & Caws consequently there is no probability of their hunting buffaloes this year although they said they were going for the purpose of getting horses to hunt with.

The Iowas stole a basket from us yesterday containing a few small articles therefore I wish you to direct J C or M & F Robidoux to send me the following articles by Roy if he should be the bearer of this, otherwise the first opportunity.

- 1 Pair Scissors
- 2 Spools *fine* thread
- 1 Paper pins
- 2 or 3 boxes matches
- 1 steel thimble (common size for a female)
- ½ doz. skeins Black patent thread or 2 or 3 oz.
- 1 ball candle wicking

Our flour is nearly gone but I presume it is needless to hurry you in that respect. I have an Otter skin which I will send by Roy if he can take it. I could have some Otter and buffalo Robes of some Caws a few days since if I had had domestic which they wanted for tents. When at St Louis perhaps you had better get some. Last fall & winter I sold six pieces of domestic, two of drilling & two or three of bed ticking.

June 1st

Dr Sir. Your favor by Roy was duly received in which you state that you rely positively on the promise of Maj Harvey & the Indian(s?) to pay your debt, and I am very confident you will not be deceived. However you may rest assured that I will do all that lies in my power for your interest.

I have been unable to get any feathers of consequence of the Indians. Enough for our bed is all that I could get in any way consequently we would be poorly prepared to accommodate friends should any favor us with a visit. I know of no chance of getting any without sending to St Louis therefore if you will get fifty or one hundred pounds & send them me I will not only be thankful but endeavor to compensate you.

June 3

Messrs Robidoux

By the bearer I send five coon one wolf & 1 cat skin in hopes that they will arrive before Joe Robidoux starts for St Louis.

Yours in haste

June 8/47

M & F Robidoux

Messrs. I wish you would send me as soon as possible some flour for we shall be compelled to borrow for our own consumption in a day or two. Send by the bearer Mr Irvin one pound Sal-Eratus

12 June 47

M & F Robidoux

Messrs. Yours by the Indian was received last evening. The Sacs seem particularly anxious to start as soon as possible for the Buffalo country, and they want for their outfit some things which I have not got here and Maj Rucker tells me that if I will furnish he will warrant the payment. Therefore I wish you to forward the following articles with the flour on monday.

- 20 Pieces good thick strong domestic for tents
- 1 Box tobacco or two if you have it of a cheap kind
- 6 or 8 pounds vermillion
- 1 Sack Salt
- 10 Pounds ground pepper

Maj Rucker & others here are wanting vinegar. If you have or can get a half barrel (or barrel if nothing less) and forward it with the rest I wish you would do it. We shall depend on the above articles coming on monday for we are all quite as anxious for the Indians to go as they are. The Ioways talk of going with the Sacs but I fear but few of them will go.

15th June 47

Messrs

By the bearer Brichnell, I send you four beef hides, two wolf & three coon skins. A letter sent to you by an Indian three days ago I am sorry could not have reached you before Brichnell came up. I would have gone down myself but it is very difficult for me to leave home and if I had I am not sure that I could have done much better for your ferryman seems to show little partiality lately to any person wishing to cross from this side. We shall be compelled to desert him and go to the upper ferry.
P.S. Send me a half doz pieces calico

June 17/47

Messrs

Yours of this date has been received together with the articles therein mentioned.

I am anxious to know why it is that you sent me such a bill. Is it for fear that I will not add percentage enough that you thus attempt to keep me in the dark respecting the cost of goods? I think I have too correct an idea of the value of goods to suppose that you paid 10c for domestic or 20c for tobacco &c. I have bought equally as good tobacco in St Joseph for 10c. I shall expect you to forward some Groceries &c as soon as they are received from St Louis when I shall want to know the original cost.

July 3d 1847

M & F Robidoux

Messrs—By the bearer Mr. Brichnell I send you twenty seven pair of mocasins, also Fifteen dollars cash which you will probably forward to Jh Robidoux as I suppose he needs all that he can get. Mr. Brichnell is going prepared to bring some groceries &c if they have arrived.

Please send me six pieces tape of two thirds the width of the enclosed sample. Also nine yards of dark Gingham checked.

PS. Six Small Stone Jars

July 10/47

M & F Robidoux

Messrs. The articles sent by Brichnell were received. Brichnell thinks he can not go down yet therefore as he says you want his horse he has hired the bearer an Ioway to take him down.

He has purchased Roy's crop & to-day he is going to take possession of his house or a part of it at least.

His commission has arrived.

Write by the bearer

July 12/47

M & F Robidoux

Messrs—Brichnell has requested me to write to you by Roy who is going down to day to purchase the wagon which B has here. If he has not got the means to pay for it now we do not know what the prospect of his being able to pay for it hereafter.

I have secured his debt here and he has got Brichnells note for nineteen dollars. Brichnell complains of having been deceived in regard to the possession of the house. If he buys the wagon give him an order on B for it. The accompanying letter you will please leave at the PO.

July 15/47

M & F Robidoux

Messrs—Brichnell is going to St Jo with a team to fetch some things for me & others. The following articles you will please forward

Calico

Rice

Nails Sixes Eights & Tens

Some cotton thread

1 quart varnish

1 do Spirits Turpentine

3 oz. aqua fortis

2 pounds Sal Soda

Calico Rice & Thread we are entirely out of. I have had several calls for nails lately & by keeping them I can sell some but I know not how many. The other articles for private use I must trouble you to get for me at the drug store. Do not let B complain of having too little loading.

P.S. A few doz fresh eggs will be very acceptable if you can pack them so that they will come safely.

[The following letter was not sent.]

July 27/47

Messrs M & F Robidoux

Sirs—Roy has demanded an order of Brichnell from you before he will give possession of his house, which you will please forward by the bearer Mr Scott Rucker. Send by Scott one pound Sal Eratus & some mouse traps if he can fetch them. The mice are likely to eat us out. If you will send a keg of Sal Eratus when convenient I can dispose of it here.

PS. Brichnell wishes me to caution you against saying anything to Roy that will tend to raise any excitement for he would rather camp in a fence corner than have a quarrel with any one else.

Aug 12th 47

M & F Robidoux

Messrs—By the bearer (Brichnell) I send you (27) twenty seven dollars cash, 66 pr. mcsns. 23 lbs deer 1 wolf 2 buffalo 3 cat 8 coon skins and 3 hides.

The following articles I wish you to forward me viz

1 Keg Sal Eratus we can sell here

1 small box Tea if good. If not we can not sell it here

1 lb patent thread Black, 1 do assorted if you have it

1 doz fine combs

1 box candles

1 sack salt if B can fetch it

½ doz pr (?) 2½ in Butts

Ribbon (assorted colors)

1 or 2 doz Brooms

Needles (assorted) some quite fine

A few *gay* pieces calico

A few p Brown domestic/1 p 1¼ yd wide if you have it

1 piece Bleached 1¼ wide if you have it that is good

½ box Tobacco

4 pr white American blankets

If you can get a Try square without too much trouble & forward me you will accommodate me much. Also 1 qt Turpentine. If you have fresh eggs make Brichnell contrive a plan to fetch some. The average cost of the mcsns sent was not more than twenty cents. We are occasionally obliged to let a blanket go to bury the dead when a poor one can be made to pass.

Brichnell is likely to be taken by assault and we have been obliged to take him under our wing to prevent the squaws getting him under theirs in which case we might lose him, for I am certain the search will be a hopeless one among a parcel of fat *Iowa* squaws.

Aug 22/47

Messrs Please send by the bearer the following articles.
viz

- 1 Doz boxes percussion caps
- 2 Papers & Tacks [?] 4 & 8 ozs
- ½ doz Pad Locks
- 1 Doz Nutmegs for private use

Aug 31/47

Mr. Jh Robidoux

Dr Sir—I intended to have visited you as soon as to-day but circumstances are such as to prevent me from doing so but I will go down as soon as I can leave consistently—probably this week. The *Iowa*'s have hired a Blacksmith for one month who is to commence work to-day. I wish you to send me 2lbs Borax for his use.

9th Sept 47

Dr Sir

I send by Brichnell Thirty five dollars which I have received of Volunteers & Indians.

The water had run more or less into nearly every box of goods which you sent and I thought it my duty to open and dry them but they shall be put up so that it will not cause you any difficulty in regulating your invoice.

I let Maj McDowd have a pair of green Blankets from one of the boxes. I wish you would come up as soon as convenient.

Sept 11/47

Dr Sir—Yours by Mr Wells was received with the goods sent &c. The other goods I have done what I thought best with. They would have certainly injured in a very few days had they been left. They are now put up so that there will be no difficulty in regulating your invoices. I was not aware of your having refused McDowd until now. He came here for blankets which he intended paying for until he got them when I let him have them on the recommendation of Brichnell. I had no acquaintance with him before and did not know him when I saw him at St Joseph. I have been talking with Mr Forman about Mr Hildreths coming,

who says he thinks it cannot possibly be true and that it is only an Indian tale. You may rest assured that if the attempt is made it will be prevented if Maj Rucker & myself can possibly do it and I know we can unless Maj Harvey gives him a house [?] and that I am confident he will not do.

Sept 15/47

Dr Sir—Your note & the foods by Wells & co were received this evening. Had you not better send the invoice of the goods if you can not come that I may have them arranged in readiness for the payment for when Maj Rucker comes I shall be compelled to be busy in arranging such accts as I cannot arrange before

Sept 17/47

Dr Sir—I fear Maj Rucker will pass you while you are waiting for him at St Jo and come in some other way. Should he have orders for paying the annuity at once he will *undoubtedly* endeavor to come in in such a way as to prevent its being known generally in order to make the payment before the country is crowded and the Indians & himself are harassed by claimants.

He took a team with him and he will probably leave the River at Brunswick and come by his farm on Grand River, thence by Savannah & Cables Landing, and should he find the Indians here ready he will make the payment at once without waiting for any persons whatever.

I think that your goods can be so arranged before he comes, (if attended to *very soon*) as to be convenient when the trade commences without the necessity of being in so great a hurry, as we would otherwise be compelled to be in consequently *fewer assistants* would be necessary, thus saving expense and much of the risk of loss which you know is considerable at such a time and in such a crowd.

My accts will keep me very closely engaged while the payment is making consequently, I cannot attend to other things at the same time. I shall have the Iowa accts arranged as nearly as I can beforehand but I shall be prevented from completely arranging them in consequence of the chief of the Ponting band being somewhat contrary and neglecting to come in when the rest were getting their tickets. The accts of the Iowa's amount to about four hundred & fifty dollars about half of which is for me and I fear we shall be unable to get the census of the Sacs before Maj Rucker comes, but I think I shall have less trouble to arrange their accounts than I have with the Iowas.

13 th October 1847

Dr. Sir You had hardly got out of sight before White Cloud came to beg for 2 Kegs of powder on credit for hunting. He says he is going to see you and wished me to write to you. If you think fit to give it to them, I will endeavor to arrange it so that it can be collected but I would not think it advisable to give it. If we will stop now and say *no* in all cases they will tease us but very little more and think better of us in the end, than if we keep giving but if we give powder &c, for hunting now directly after the payment, it will lead them to expect it again and prevent their buying the same articles again when they have money. He only asks for powder and a few flints now but if he gets them you know he will want other things. It is only necessary that we should be firm in refusing them a few times and we shall effectually get rid of their teasing and be able to live more peaceably. I know he will beg you hard but only think of the result and I think you can be firm enough. He says that many of them will not be able to go hunting without it but if they are allowed such things they will *never* be able to go without for the same reason.

I received a proposal early this morning for furnishing what pork we shall want for bacon next year here, at the market price in St. Joseph, which I intended to mention to you before you left but I forgot it. I expect an answer will be required before I can hear from you, but I think there can be no impropriety in my engaging it. Do not forget to send some fine combs if you get this in time. Send Vermillion & Bridles if you have them.

14th Oct 1847

Dear Sir.

Enclosed you will find some Receipts which Maj. Rucker wished me to forward to you for your signature. He wishes you to sign them and return them by the first opportunity so that he could settle the matter with me as soon as he gets Maj Millers Receipts by Joseph Deroin.

He wishes me to caution you against signing them in the wrong place. It is the Receipt at the bottom of the acct that you are to sign.

Should you receive this before the team starts up Please send me 1 bushel of Green apples if you can get them handy.

Do not forget to send some fine combs & vermilion. Some bridles if you have them. I received about \$10 yesterday mostly for wampum. Send 2 lbs Borax.

I had some candlesticks laid aside with the crockery ware for me when I was down which I have not received. I wish you would send them by the first opportunity. I cannot avoid again expressing the opinion that you had better come up or send your invoices immediately.

18th Oct 47

Dr Sir. Yours of this morning has been received with the other documents forwarded.

As soon as J Deroin arrives with the necessary Receipts from Maj Miller I will get the \$230 in gold and fetch it to you.

Maj Rucker says he has already chosen his Lot viz. Lot No 6 Block 27.

The powder and lead which you sent by the Indian has been received and distributed according to directions. I understand the Sacs are waiting to get credit before they go hunting, which I humbly trust they will not get. They have money enough to buy their necessities *and some whiskey*.

I shall not start for Grand River under three weeks at least, and not until all the Indians have gone hunting that will go at all. I think I can get a trusty person here (a young man at the Mission) to take care of things in my absence—and I will pay the expense. I have traded but very little since you left not more than Twenty five dollars. The Sacs have some money yet, and the Iowa's a little but I think it will nearly all go for whiskey.

Oct 23/47

Dr Sir. The desire to send other information has induced me to write for Little wolf who is begging for as much credit as the others have got for himself and four or five others. I am confident you will say *no* as I have done. Like the others he appealed to you.

J. Deroin sent an Indian down yesterday with the receipts from Maj Miller which are satisfactory. He will not be down himself for five or six days. My horse is still behind whether dead or alive I know not.

Brichnell wishes me to say that he is well but lonesome without a squaw. As soon as he can get Rubitt (?) to go he will go down with Catharine and he says he is going to leave her to go to school this winter.

He expects *one squaw* at least in a week or less. If you send an answer with the Indian Please to give an unqualified *No* and Repeat your instruction to me to give no credit at all and I will adhere to it closely.

Oct 28th 47

Dear Sir—The following articles are wanted here—viz.

Flour	Soap
Sugar	Thread
Powder	Needles
Lead	Small Tin pans
Flints	

All of which we are entirely out of except Powder and not five pounds of that. The Potawatomi are now passing and if I had had a suitable supply of goods for them I could have got two or three hundred and perhaps more of them. As it is I have done the best I could. They wanted Groceries and *clothing* caps &c. But it would be useless to send clothing now. I endeavored to hire an Indian to carry a letter to you two days ago but could not get one that had a horse nor could I get one for an Indian to ride. Mine has not yet returned from the Bluffs. Whether he is alive or not I do not know. I tried to raise a team but could not. The news from J Deroin you have probably received by Mr Forman. I wrote to you the day after you returned from St Jo. by an Indian but found yesterday that he had not gone down.

The Mission team is going down tomorrow and I have engaged them to haul the things. Flints are wanted badly.

I have just received yours by Indian Robidoux. Some of the things wanted I have not got, but what I have I will give them, viz

6 hoes	37½c	2.25	
6 axes	1.00	6.00	
1 Doz playing cards		1.25	
1 Nest Iron Kettles 34 lb. 25c	8.50		18.00
<hr/>			
4 large Tin Kettles	1.50	6.00	
2 Doz large pans	4.00	8.00	
2 Pieces Strond 39 yds	1.40	54.60	
1 Scarlet 20 yds	1.40	28.00	96.60
<hr/>			
			\$114.60

I have sold all the Bacon except one small piece. The Tin Kettles are all that I have and the pans are all of a large size.

By the bearer Mr Hamilton I send you Seventy Dollars in Silver.

29th Oct 47

Dear Sir. I have given Indian Robidoux a camp Kettle according to order.

J Deroin has come and passed down without calling on me. I understand from Brichnell that he has not brought my horse and I shall be compelled to buy one in consequence for immediate use.

Nov 8/47

Messrs

Tomorrow I start for Grand River.

Those three barrels of flour are wanted here badly by Interpreters and others. If you have an opportunity send them and Brichnell will take care of them.

M & F Robidoux

Dec 9th

Dear Sir. The Iowa smith Mr Tinker requests me to send by the bearer Mr Billings to St Joseph for a Blacksmith sledge.

He wants one of the largest size that can be obtained.

I have asked Mr Billings to haul the other things but he says he does not know whether he can or not. Please persuade him to fetch them if possible.

Dec 16th 1847

Dear Sir. Yours by the Mormon was received and I avail myself of the first opportunity for sending an answer. viz By F Brichnell who starts down to-morrow with such team as he has got but I fear his wagon will fall down before he gets to St Joseph.

Robitaille's wagon is constantly going for it does all the hauling for the neighborhood. You will perceive by the Document which I send you that I shall be *under the necessity* of taking inventory of the goods on hand whenever I receive more and furnish a copy together with the invoice to the Agent. Such things are troublesome and I think needless but the *Department* require it and we are *compelled to comply*. To avoid being compelled to do it often I think it would be advisable to send goods in larger quantities, while that and other considerations convince me that you had better hire an ox team and send us a full load for we need them here. You can watch an opportunity and cross it when the river is passable while a person going from here runs the risk of a chance to get over. The Indians

are coming in daily and we want the goods badly. I will give you a list of things wanted in addition to those of which I gave you a list the other day.

Dried Fruit

Brown domestic several pieces

1 or 2 more pieces of fine *Bleached* do

combs. coarse and Fine

Bar Soap & Country do if you have it

Blue Calico

Black Pepper

1 small Box good Tea

Vermillion & Ribbon

Several Doz Tin Cups and coffee pots or Tea pots

Several Doz. Smallest size Tin pans

Worsted Yarn. Needles & Thread

1 Bbl Sugar. 1 Sack coffee & Flour

All those things I am out or nearly out of. If you will send an application in writing for a license dated at the time of giving your bond or a few days before say the 10 th of August, I think he Maj. Rucker will grant a license in the form required by the new regulations.

Ear Bobs Wampum & Finger rings are frequently called for. If you have any of them, you had better send them. Maj. Rucker & Mr. Lyda came to me a few days since and requested me to board them, to which I consented since there was no other place where they could get boarding, Mrs. Formans health being such that they could keep them no longer.

Brichnell can answer personally for the contents of this letter.

Dec. 22/47

Dear Sir—The goods sent by Brichnell were received last evening together with the letter which you sent the perusal of which somewhat surprised me. It seems you do not understand my motive or have not that confidence in me which I could wish you to have. You mistake me if you think it is a large quantity of goods that I want, it is only an assortment of such goods as I can sell here and a quantity sufficient to keep that assortment good that I want and which I think it is your interest to keep. You assure me that I will always have double quantity on hand that Indians are able to buy. You know that I have a quantity of goods on hand that they will not buy for they are not saleable. What

I called for was goods that I knew would sell between this and spring all of which I supposed you had on hand and would like to have sold and you must be aware that a trade in furs can be conducted more advantageously with a good assortment of goods, especially small articles. I have some sugar & coffee on hand but I wanted more before it was gone. I received a barrel of sugar as you say before I went to Grand River, but you mistake when you say that you sent me coffee then for I have received none since before the payment. Such articles as salt, thread, &c that you say you have been in the habit of giving them I sell enough to quit the cost. Several times lately I have had coon skins thrown on my counter and salt called for in exchange. In a former letter you complain of small profits. I assure you your profits can be no other then small here if you continue to send such invoices as the two last which I received. When you was here, you sold calico and many other things as low as they sell it in St Joseph and you must be aware that if I do not do pretty near the same thing I shall sell nothing yet in your invoices you charge me 18c for calico on which the retail price is marked $16\frac{2}{3}$ and in one instance I have been charged 18c for calico which was bought in St. Louis for 7c. Cotton thread at \$1.00 per lb. and many other things at the prices charged I consider very *strong* when a profit is expected afterwards. I credit no Indian at all nor have I credited any person since the payment that is not in employ here except a few dollars to J B Roy.

A few things more which we are entirely out of I wish you would send by Mr. Billings the bearer viz,

Brown Domestic — Soap — Fancy Calico — Ribbon —

I have seen Maj Rucker but a few minutes to day and said nothing to him about your license but will talk to him tomorrow. Brichnells team ran away from him in coming up with his squaw but I believe did no serious damage except by the wheel running over his foot.

Dec 29th 47

Dear Sirs Yours by Billings with the goods was received. By the bearer Mr. Story I send you Forty Dollars. Maj Rucker showed me your letter to him. He can not give me your license until he has sent it to Washington City for approval. Mr Forman will be down in a few days who will see you in relation to it.

Wishing you a happy new year

Jan 7th 1848

Dear Sir

Mr Forman having deferred going to your place as soon as I expected and wishing to have your license regulated as soon as possible I have drawn an application for you, also the bond both of which I forward to you for the necessary signatures wishing you to return them immediately for they will have to go to the Department for confirmation. By the time they return I will get the license ready for Maj Rucker to sign, so that they may all be forwarded without farther delay. It will be necessary for you to bear in mind that Maj Rucker is required to certify to the sufficiency of the sureties as required in paragraph 8 of the regulations. Maj Rucker requests that the signature to the bond be witnessed by some persons where it is done.

By Brichnell I send you 203 coon skins & 5 dry hides. 1 bed cord 25.

The money I sent by Mr Story I have received no notice of. When I send money I would like to be notified of the receipt of it. 70 dollars sent by Mr. Hamilton some two months since I have never received a receipt for. I wish you would get Mr. Hull¹ to fill the jug with molasses which I sent by Brichnell before and tell him to charge to me. Why have you never sent me any ribbon, it was nearly gone at the time of the Iowa payment and I have received none since.

Some writing paper if you please.

Jan 12/48

Dr Sir. By the bearer I wish you to send me some flour if you can get it. If not a sack of salt. I just gave Mr. Forman Sixteen dollars for you. He talks of going tomorrow but it is uncertain.

Jan 13th, 48

Dr Sir. Yours by the Indian of Jan 3 was received this evening. I have shown it to Maj Rucker who says he is not angry with you but thinks he has not been treated right respecting his lot. Had it been respecting any thing here or any of your business here that he complained I would have considered it my duty to have satisfied him if possible but as it was entirely a private matter between him & yourself,

¹J. C. Hull, a St. Joseph Merchant. In 1852, when Harding operated his own Indian trading post in Wathena, he made most of his purchases from Hull.

I did not wish to interfere and have said less to him perhaps than I have to you on the subject knowing that it was beyond my power to satisfy him. If you could see him I have no doubt but you could satisfy him, or if you will inform me how I can be of service to you in the case I will attend to it cheerfully.

Jan 18th 1848

Dr Sir. I received four letters from you pr Brichnell also the articles sent.

I have written a letter to you in answer to that sent by the Indian but have had no opportunity to send it till now.

I beseech you to pay no attention to the idle tales which you hear from here nor any report at all except by persons on whose word you can place full reliance and then be careful to enquire of the proper person.

Jan 19/48

Dr Sir. If you will send me a pair or two of those Brown Mixed blankets I can sell them here if you have them.

Jan 29th/48

Dr Sir. By Brichnell I send you eight dollars.

Feb 7/48

Dr Sir. Brichnell returned safely with his load but I think his squaw packed his apples up every hill on the route until he came here when it took two men and a preacher to help him up the hill to the house.

Your license is here ready for the Maj to sign. It would have been signed and forwarded before the Maj left if Brichnell had returned with the papers or sent them as he promised instead of lying on the bank of the river as though he had rather camp out than to be at home. I expect the Maj back in a few days when it shall be arranged. The Indians will positively be paid a part of their annuity in the spring but in what month I can not tell probably not before May. Mrs. Harding is now much better and able to sit up some. Like many sick persons she is rather whimsical about eating and wishes for Buckwheat cakes. I wish you would try to get some 20 or 30 pounds of Buckwheat flour and send it up the first opportunity. Charge to my private account. We are entirely out of sugar. I expect the Mormons will go down in a few days when I shall send for some.

Feb 16/48

Dr Sir. Our Mormons are going to your place tomorrow with a team. If they can fetch it I wish you would send me a bbl of sugar for we are entirely out. They are going after lumber without a bed on their wagon or I would send some things down. I send thirteen dollars cash.

Robitaille has moved the rails from the Roy place and says he bought them of Roy who says he sold nothing to you but the house. Brichnell has moved again and into the smoke house by the Roy house and Roy has moved back here again into the cabin at the end of our house. I think he is employed by the mission to assist in translating.

Brichnell is again a *grass widower*.

Send me a ball of candle wicking and charge to private account. The Maj has not yet returned.

(To Be Continued)