

## From Old Vincennes, 1815

*Edited by Chase C. Mooney\**

The flow of immigrants into the West had quickened during the beginning of the second decade of the nineteenth century, and not even continued Indian troubles and the War of 1812 could do more than slow it somewhat. With the coming of peace, the westward movement became a veritable flood, and in the five years from 1816 to 1821 five new western states were added to the Union. The author of the letter reproduced here apparently did not wait for news of the end of the War of 1812, which came early in 1815, to begin his journey to Vincennes, Indiana.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing is known of Caleb Townes, either before he left New York or after he settled in the Vincennes region. He probably was an Easterner—perhaps from Connecticut—who had been acquainted with Oliver Wolcott and who stopped in the New York vicinity to see this former resident of Connecticut. Townes probably went up the Hudson Valley, west through the Mohawk Valley to see one of the Wolcott relatives, and then, by the route he describes, across Lake Erie, overland to Waterford, and down French Creek past present Meadville, Franklin, and Kittanning to Pittsburgh. After a stay of several days and a side trip at Pittsburgh, he proceeded via the Ohio River to Louisville, and then went overland, perhaps by the Buffalo Trace, to Vincennes. Many before, and more afterwards, traveled the same route.

Townes' letter addressed to Oliver Wolcott and George Gibbs<sup>2</sup> was mailed to Wolcott in New York City. It indicates that Townes was an intelligent person, that he was very probably a person with some resources, that his "plans"

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<sup>1</sup> This letter is in the Oliver Wolcott Papers, Vol. 23, item 148, at the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut. The editor wishes to thank that society for permission to publish it.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Wolcott, 1760-1833, secretary of the treasury under Washington and Adams, was in business in New York in 1815. In that same year, he closed out his business, returned to his native state of Connecticut, served as governor from 1817 to 1827, and later returned to New York. *Dictionary of American Biography* (22 vols., New York, 1928-1958), XX, 443-445.

George Gibbs, 1776-1833, mineralogist and horticulturist, loaned his famous mineral collection to Yale for many years and then sold it to that university in 1825. The courtesy "Colonel," owner of the "Gibbs-Channing" portrait of Washington, was the husband of Oliver Wolcott's daughter Laura, and their sons George and Wolcott were famous in

involved more than "grubbing" a mere subsistence from the soil, and that he might have made a fine promoter of the West. He certainly was a booster: the fish were almost incredibly large, wheat production fantastically high, fertile land everywhere in abundance, and the West an "*inconceivably important section.*" It should be remembered that in 1815 there were many—especially in the East—who still thought of the West as an area that would remain in permanent subordination to the older sections of the county and felt that the Mississippi was an appropriate western boundary of the United States.

Vincennes March 6,<sup>th</sup> 1815<sup>1</sup>

Gentlemen

After requesting your acceptance of my best acknowledgements for the civilities and friendly attentions whilst in the vicinity of New York, let me claim a few Moments of your time while I endeavour to convey to you some idea of the fruits of your kindness as well as of the grateful impressions which I have to acknowledge have been my comfortable companions through a long, generally interesting, but sometimes dreary rout[e].

First let me acknowledge the gratifying reception and attention of our friends M<sup>r</sup> & M<sup>rs</sup> Wadsworth<sup>2</sup> and the very

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the fields of ethnology and chemistry, respectively. The younger George was also editor of *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams, . . . from the Papers of Oliver Wolcott, secretary of the Treasury* (2 vols., New York, 1846). See also, Richard J. Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition, 1775-1818* (Washington, D.C., 1918); [Samuel Putnam Avery], *Some Account of the "Gibbs-Channing" Portrait of George Washington. Painted by Gilbert Stuart* (New York, 1900); *Dictionary of American Biography*, VII, 244-246, 251-252.

<sup>1</sup> Except as indicated, this letter has been reproduced as exactly as possible. No punctuation has been added or deleted. Townes' capitalization is not consistent and at places is open to question. The judgment of the eye has been followed.

<sup>2</sup> Probably a reference to James Wadsworth, 1768-1844, a Yale graduate who with his brother William had taken up land, in 1790, in the Gorham Purchase in western New York a little below the present town of Geneseo. He raised corn, produced and manufactured hemp, kept herds of cattle, bred mules, and "prosecuted wool-growing on a large scale." Among the largest landowners of cultivated areas, he was interested in political science and the physical sciences, and "no one in the state was more energetic in efforts to improve the common-

interesting result of my enquiries and visit to that hospitable and truly patriotic family— I have too much to communicate to permit my filling my paper with either words, descriptions or commendations— I was highly gratified with my visit— my impressions of the family and of the highly interesting importance of its pursuits and effects upon Society may be a subject for another letter; but at present, I can only say that I feel greatly indebted to you for this portion of my comfort—for it was to me a truly comfortable as well as interesting visit— Imagine to yourselves one of the most extensive and well conducted farms in the World— About eight thousand Sheep—near two thousand lambs—One thousand five hundred tons of Hay, in barracks through the meadows—A dairy of Eighty Milch Cows—all under the directions of a farmer, a gentleman and Man of Science—all conducted on a scale and in a stile worthy the imitation and approbation of all who may be favored with the opportunities and privileges it has been my good fortune to experience—I will only add that I obtained here every information necessary for the prosecution of my plans and the most confirming proofs of the propriety of the contemplated project I could desire— My Whole rout[e] through this country was highly interesting—as was that up Lake Erie, which was effected in a castel schooner of 100 tons burthen to Presque isle;<sup>3</sup> from this I went over a turnpike road of 15 miles to Waterford,<sup>4</sup> at the head of the Allegany Waters on le bauf on the scite of the old fort le Bauf—<sup>5</sup>here I found the first specimens of Marine petrifications, on the highest dividing ground between the Waters of the Lake and those of the southern Country—after this I found them all the way down to the falls of Ohio—at Louisville—here they abound on the rock

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school system.” On October 1, 1804, Wadsworth had married Naomi, daughter of Samuel and Jerusha Wolcott. Their son James was a Civil War general who died of wounds received at the Battle of the Wilderness in May, 1864. *Dictionary of American Biography* (22 vols., New York, 1928-1958), XIX, 307-309.

<sup>3</sup> The Presque Isle referred to here is the “near island” in Lake Erie which helps to form the bay of the same name on which Erie, Pa., is situated.

<sup>4</sup> Waterford, Pa., is actually about twenty miles south of Presque Isle.

<sup>5</sup> Fort Le Boeuf was one of the chain of forts which France established between Lake Erie and the forks of the Ohio in the early 1750's. George Washington went to Fort Le Boeuf in 1753 to protest French fortification of the area.

over which the Water falls, but which at low boating is dry—you will find almost every thing you can imagine and an abundance you could not imagine—Marine productions—Scallop Shells—Corals of Various Kinds—Buffaloes Horns—Hornets Nests—Wasps Nests—various Animal as well as Vegetable substances—the whole Mass appears a conglomeration of various objects rolled up in a calcarious Matter

I took my passage [from Waterford] in an ark or flatt boat covered in on all sides and at top about 30 feet long & 15 broad—loaded with peltry & furs from Mackinaw<sup>6</sup>—this mode of travelling was quite new to me—passing through le bauf—and french creek, our passage was very narrow and much obstructed by trees & brush—but our Company composed of one young lady of very respectable deportment under care of two gentlemen—six sailors from Com<sup>r</sup> Perrys' ship and three soldiers; making the best of our situation and means, we had a tolerable agreeable passage & we arrived at Pittsburgh in good condition and ready for the change—

The thriving state of this place is too well known to require description but no one can imagine how excessively disagreeable the numerous columns of smoak issuing from the furnaces—glass works—and other manufacturies as well as from every chimney in the place make it to those who are not accustomed to Coal fires— After visiting the Harmony settlement under George Rapp at Beaver,<sup>7</sup> and staying about a week at this place, I left Pitt in a Keel—a long boat much resembling the inland boats of the delaware, except that they have the addition of a board covering—much resembling a rope walk— We stopt at St[e]ubenville a very thriving place—as well as several other New towns, which, by the by, are

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<sup>6</sup> Mackinaw, Mackinac, or Michilimackinac was one of the strategic points in the Old Northwest. The French fort on the south side of the strait between Lake Huron and Lake Michigan was constructed in 1712 and surrendered in 1761 to the British, who held it for thirteen years after the Treaty of Paris of 1783. This fort fell to the British in 1812 but, along with the island of the same name, was restored to the United States in July, 1815.

<sup>7</sup> Oliver H. Perry, victor in the battle of Lake Erie on September 10, 1813. His promotion to captain was back-dated to that day.

<sup>8</sup> The Rapp colony in Butler County, Pa., comprised about 5,000 acres and was settled in 1805. In the spring of 1815, soon after Townes had visited it, the colony was moved to Harmony, Ind. John S. Duss, *George Rapp and his Associates* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1914); Duss, *The Harmonists: A Personal History* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1943); George Lockwood, *The New Harmony Movement* (New York, 1905). When the Indiana colony was sold to Robert Owen, a third Rappite settlement was made, in 1825, at Economy, Pa., about eighteen miles below Pittsburgh.

growing up all along the river, as well as all through the Country—Marietta is a decent place; but being liable to the annual overflowing of the Ohio does not advance as fast as its circumstances would otherwise lead one to expect.

Here I first saw those unaccountable Monuments of Antiquity—the Mounds—Walls—elevated plains—squares—circles—parrals &c.—We arrived at Cincinnati—a place that will unquestionably become a very important place of trade and manufactures—having every facility added to one of the most interesting Countries for agriculture and the Arts, perhaps in the world—here also are other specimens of those Monuments of antiquity—But the most extraordinary that I have met with are at the Mouth of the Miami, about 15 miles below, on the ground of Gen<sup>l</sup> Harrison,<sup>9</sup> near his residence at North bend—on the high ground between that river & the Ohio—are erected a regular Work and Mound—covering 16 acres—the ridge is about 200 feet high and about 600 feet wide, but comes to a point of about 100: on the extre[me] point is a Mound; the base supported by a Wall of Stones of about 2 feet wide of lime stone, evidently obtained from the vicinity laid together very neatly but without Cement or the appearance of a hammer on any of the stones—which are generally of from 2 to 4 inches thick and from one to 2 feet wide[—]the form of the inclosure is nearly like the sketch on this paper; with two regular bastions on the North end: the whole supported by a stone wall as before described, within and without—the earthen wall is 30 feet at the base about 14 feet high from the bottom of the stone wall; 6 feet on the top and communicating with the mound at the point as follows<sup>10</sup>

What all these Monuments could ever have been constructed for I am utterly at a loss to imagine—this certainly gives the idea of a regular fortification—but the mounds which are numerous over this western Country I am totally at a loss to find the motive—

<sup>9</sup> William Henry Harrison, 1773-1841, governor of the Indiana Territory from 1800 until 1812 and ninth president of the United States.

<sup>10</sup> Townes' elementary line-sketch, which he mentions above and which appears at this point is not considered of sufficient significance to be reproduced.

For information on the Ohio mounds, see, Henry Clyde Shetrone, *The Mound-Builders* . . . (New York, 1930), 165-267, but especially 188-194, 261-263, 266-267. There were several types of mounds: sacrifice, temple, burial, defense, signal or observation, and effigy or animal.

Near Vincennes there are four large ones in view of the town— I have with others measured by pacing the circumference of several; two of which were, to the best of our judgment, 300 yards round—<sup>11</sup> Thus we have satisfactory evidence of this Country having experienced three different states of occupancy— First, By the Marine World: second, by a numerous population of the human family— But whether they were ever advanced to that state of society we designate by the term 'Cultivated,' I am, I confess, at a loss to decide— I have seen instances of neat pottery, a considerable quantity of which has been discovered in & near some Mounds near Saline on the Wabash near its mouth; but nothing that I can learn that gives us reason to believe that they have ever possessed the Arts or Sciences in the perfection we have known them to be in our history. But unquestionably this part of the World has sustained a very large population— but what has carried them off so completely—or When, remains an inscrutable mystery—third—The Aborigines of the present era, and Wild Beasts that still possess, though disputing their claims with the fourth, now rapidly advancing and will soon induce an entire New order of things in this *inconceivably important section* of our Country. I will not detain you any longer on the Way than to say that on my arrival at Louisville, which I found to be an active place of business; and will, one day, become an important place from its local situation, at the falls, and many concurring circumstances. I crossed over to a villiage called Jeffersonville containing about a dozen houses; along a pleasantly situated Bank, commanding a beautiful view of the Ohio both up the river and over the falls or rapids below; which, when the river is low, exhibits a very grand piece of scenery—two ranges of Islands forming the three Shutes—called the Kentucky—Middle & Indian Shute<sup>12</sup> the last is by far the most interesting: the

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<sup>11</sup> Townes' estimate exactly fits the measurements given for the Pyramid Mound, but the distance around Sugarloaf falls about 100 feet short of 300 yards. Eli Lilly, *Prehistoric Antiquities of Indiana* . . . (Indianapolis, Ind., 1937), 76-80.

<sup>12</sup> The Indian Chute was the northernmost and principal of three channels used by boats in descending the falls. This chute, as well as the Middle and Kentucky chutes, became impassable when the water was low. When the water was high, the rocky spires in the Indian Chute were hidden, thus making passage more dangerous than ever. It was, then, usable with comparative safety only when the river was at the middle stages. H. M'Murtrie, *Sketches of Louisville And its Environs* . . . (Louisville, Ky., 1819), 14-18.

town of Louisville shows from this place to considerable advantage, and is a handsome object in the general scenery— After paying my respects to the Governor (Posey)<sup>13</sup> who resides at this place at present, I set off in company with an officer of the Rangers,<sup>14</sup> and immediately entered the Wilderness, not meeting with but three houses—and but a few very indifferent Cabins the whole distance of 120 miles—<sup>15</sup> Our Company was soon increased to ten and, part of the way, twelve. We got along pretty well; experiencing but few privations more than we expected, therefore we did not find much fault— The first & second days travel about 60 miles was through Beach Wood &c—the number or rather quantity of Pidgeons were beyond all credibility—a place, called emphatically, the “Pigeon Roost;”<sup>16</sup> where these birds retire from the severity of the Northern Winters, cannot be described—nor obtain belief, were it described—at least fifty acres of woods in one area totally stripped of their limbs—many of the trees of a foot diameter actually broken down to the ground by the the [*sic*] numbers and weight of the Pigeons—the destruction of timber is inconceivable; and it is very extraordinary that they every winter retire here and vicinity—making a havock in the timber that cannot be credited and covering the ground with their droppings from 12 to 18 inches deep. They drive off in immense flocks through the Beach Woods for an immense extent and sweep up all the Mast to the great injury of the Hog proprietor—they are in a word a great nuisance to the Country— The Par-

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Posey, 1750-1818, second and last territorial governor of Indiana (1813-1816).

<sup>14</sup> Seventeen companies of United States Rangers were authorized between January 2, 1812, and February 25, 1813, and they were retained in service until June 15, 1815. No field officers were authorized or appointed. Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* . . . (2 vols., Washington, D.C., 1903), I, 141.

<sup>15</sup> The distance from Clarksville, Ind., to Vincennes is given as 114 miles by William Darby, *Emigrant's Guide to the Western and Southwestern States and Territories* . . . (New York, 1818), 275. The road followed was approximately the route of U.S. Highway 150, and was known by various names, such as the Old Indian Trail, Louisville Trace, Vincennes Trace, and Buffalo Trace. George R. Wilson and Gayle Thornbrough, *The Buffalo Trace* (Indiana Historical Society Publications, Vol. 15, No. 2; Indianapolis, Ind., 1946).

<sup>16</sup> The location of this place is not known. A Pigeon Roost, site of the massacre during the War of 1812, is about twenty miles due north of Jeffersonville; Townes presumably moved northwest from Jeffersonville. The birds to which he refers are passenger pigeons.

roquet<sup>17</sup> is also in considerable abundance and extremely troublesome & injurious to the farmer destroying his Corn and fruit of all Kinds— They will sometimes sweep a whole Orchard of the fruit, not merely by eating but by biting the fruit and cutting the stems— The Country all the way through is indeed *excellent land*—a few Hills, called the Knobs, 7 miles from Jeffersonville and a range of Hills near White river, filled with Iron ore, are all the Hills worth naming

The Geography of this Country need not be described: but I never met with any acc<sup>t</sup>. of the topography that could be relied on— Volney's<sup>18</sup> view of the Climate Winds &c. of this Country I found pretty correct—and may corroborate what I may say of it.<sup>19</sup>

*All the Land* of this territory, with the exception of a small range of Hills, which run from the Ohio, northerly for about 100 Miles, and the low grounds south of the mouth of White river, 20 Miles below this, on the Wabash, may be considered second to none in the World. The first rate lands lie on the Wabash all the way to the Lakes (except the low lands above mentioned) on the most beautiful stream in my recollection—it is about 250 yards wide at this place; and preserves its width very nearly for 400 miles—its sinuosities are sufficient to make it beneficial to the Country without injuring its commercial value— With the exception of the rapids, about 20 Miles below, which opposes difficulties only 2 months in the Year to the *large boats*, you have an uninterrupted navigation from *New Orleans* to *Quebec*, and with the exception of about 7 Miles in dry times, at the

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<sup>17</sup> The *Conurus carolinensis* or Carolina parakeet formerly ranged the eastern United States from Florida and the Gulf Coast to Denver, Colo., and up to northern Nebraska, Iowa, northern Illinois, southern Michigan, and to Albany, N.Y. It was all but extinct by 1900. Amos W. Butler, "The Birds of Indiana," in Indiana, *Department of Geology and Natural Resources, Twenty-second Annual Report . . . 1897* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1898), 819.

<sup>18</sup> Reference probably is to the translation of Constantin Francois Chasseboeuf Volney, *View of the Climate of the Soil of the United States of America* (London, 1804). Volney was in Vincennes in 1796.

<sup>19</sup> For other descriptions of the area through which Townes traveled and of many other places, and things, that he does not mention, see Harlow Lindley (ed.), *Indiana As Seen By Early Travelers: A Collection of Reprints from Books of Travel, Letters and Diaries Prior to 1830* (Indiana Historical Collections, [Vol. III]; Indianapolis, Ind., 1916).



carrying place<sup>20</sup> at the heads of this river and the Miami of the lake—& that of niagara— This rout[e] has long been pursued by the old french traders: several of whom I have conversed with, who had followed the fur trade by this rout[e] for many years— The *Wabash* rises in a level Country,<sup>21</sup> consequently is not subject to those sudden floods and rapid streams, so prevalent on the Western Waters. Its rising is slow and regular, taking several Weeks to get up to full beds—and as long & slow in falling—in common times it does not run more than 1 & ½ Miles [per†] hour & seldom if ever exceeds 2½— It is a beautiful and valuable stream—the water generally perfectly clear & transparent—exhibiting a clean gravelly bottom— It abounds with Fish of various kinds—Bass—Pickerel, Pike—Perch—Catfish &c. The inhabitants in the season easily supply their families—the fishing season is just commencing they have caught some very fine Bass—&c. The Catfish are of every size up to 122½ lb one of this size was lately caught (at fort Harrison<sup>22</sup> 80 Miles above this)— The perch are from 12 inches to 20 in length—this appears to be dealing in the marvellous but it is nevertheless correct—a large White fish about 2½ feet long with very little bone was yesterday caught by a gentleman on a party said to be excellent.

The *White river* and its branches are the principal waters of the *Wabash* and runs through a most delightful and excellent Country (rapidly settling) and empties empties [*sic*] itself as above mentioned— The Potoki [Patoka], running nearly east and west, runs through an excellent country but is not valued either for its falls or its facilities to commerce— The Vermillion [Vermilion], Missisinaway [Mississinewa],

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<sup>20</sup> The "carrying place" was nine miles from Fort Wayne, the present site of the city of Fort Wayne, Ind.

<sup>21</sup> The *Wabash* rises at an elevation of 1,285 feet and empties into the Ohio at an elevation of 313 feet. The river is 475 miles long, so the average drop per mile is only slightly more than two feet. For the story of the *Wabash*, see William E. Wilson, *The Wabash* (New York, 1940).

† Townes consistently uses a symbol for "per" that it is not possible to reproduce. Therefore, here and elsewhere in his letter this symbol has been replaced by the word "per" marked with a dagger (†) and placed in brackets.

<sup>22</sup> Fort Harrison, just north of present-day Terre Haute, was established in 1811.

and Raccoon Creeks are the principal Waters above;<sup>23</sup> but there are no falls on any of them worthy of note. [The remainder of the line is marked through and is only partly legible.]

White river has some very valuable falls—some improvements are begining to be made on it and promises great advantage to the undertakers—having abundance of timber—in the heart of a most valuable Wheat and Corn Country—Coal is also abundant on the branches of this river and sold at 2 Cents [per†] bushel at the *Bank*—but it may be had and is *taken* from unseated lands by all who want it. The *range of Hills*, before mentioned abound with excellent Iron ore: and runs through the “White river Country”[—] “*Sugar Orchards*”<sup>24</sup> abound every where; and [an] abundance of Sugar is obtained from them—the trees are very fine and numerous—as is also Walnut—and a a [*sic*] great variety of other valuable timber.

*White Water* is a stream that flows into the Great Miami, near Cincinnati—running by [*sic*] nearly easterly; and passes through a delightful Country and valuable lands—the Whole territory with the exception of the Hills and low grounds already mentioned, may be considered an “undulating” rather than a “rolling Country”—and the *Praries* which constitute so important a feature in this Western World, & which merits particular notice—there are no broken ground in them—no Hills—but, generally, either a gently undulating or large flatts—interspersed with Bayou’s and Lakes or ponds—

The *Entries* that have been made and are daily making at the [Land] Offices, in the territory, are on the Wabash as high as the old purchase line about 20 Miles above this at Bus-

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<sup>23</sup> Townes was not too accurate in his description of the Wabash and its tributaries. See map accompanying C[harles] C. Royce, “Cessions of Land by Indian Tribes to the United States: Illustrated by those in the State of Indiana,” in U.S., *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology* . . . 1879-’80 . . . (Washington, D.C., 1881), 249-262.

<sup>24</sup> Groves or “forests” of the sugar maple. On the making of maple sugar in Indiana, see R. Carlyle Buley, *The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840* (2 vols., Indianapolis, Ind., 1950), I, 224, 338.

saro<sup>25</sup>—(a late purchase<sup>26</sup> but not exposed to sale yet goes as high as fort Harrison, about 80 miles)—On the White river—on Potoki—and on White Water—but few going into the interior, to what is called “the Barrens”— which by the by are some of the best lands in the world; that is, they will yield 20 bushels of Wheat & 45 of corn—but Storms having blown down the timber of some considerable districts—the fires succeeding destroy the vegetation and gives it the appearance of barrens, which, heightened by some few spots of light sand confir[m]ing the opinion;—but compared with the lands on the atlantic country would be esteemed *Valuable*—

On all these districts very valuable purchases might be made—the War and some other circumstances have retarded, but not discouraged the idea of settlement: *four hundred families* are now on Bussaro waiting for permission to go on the “New purchase”; they are now in what are called open camps that is, sheds formed of split logs reared up against a pole lodged on saplings, with a fire in front. Coal abounds up the Wabash, from 15 to 100 Miles above this place and is obtained at a very small expence, delivered at 5 Cents at this place— The advantages that this Country offers to Commerce is very great indeed: and the people are not insensible to it.— A Mill for making flour is about to be erected to be driven by steam— Coal at 5 Cents or Wood at 1.50 [per†] Cord [—] Wheat formerly 50 Cents, now 75 [per†] bushel— Corn 25—Beef 3 dolls [per†] hund—pork 3. Venison one Cent [per†] lb—or 1 dollar [per†] carcass—Wild turkies 25 cents [—] Ducks and Prairy Hens 9 to 12 cents—the latter much like a pheasant in size—and plumage, are Numerous

*Praries*— It will be impossible to give an idea of these extraordinary and highly valuable portions of Country—their extent—their Beauty—their *Richness* the facility with which

<sup>25</sup> Busseron Creek empties into the Wabash about eighteen miles north of Vincennes. The northern boundary of the 1803 cession intersects with the Wabash about ten miles north of the mouth of Busseron Creek. See map accompanying Royce, “Cessions of Land,” U.S., *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology . . . 1879-'80. . .*

<sup>26</sup> The “late purchase” apparently refers to the treaties of the last part of 1809 which pushed the boundary some twenty miles north of Fort Harrison. Dwight L. Smith, “Indian Land Cessions in the Old Northwest, 1795-1809” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Indiana University, 1949).

the native vegetation yields to *every thing* that is introduced—although for Miles you cannot see a stump—stone—or switch yet introduce forest or fruit trees—field or garden seed, all take quiet and complete possession—burn off the Prairie grass—harrow the ground—sow any kind of grass seed and you have a new inhabitant—it is an astonishing fact— Although the native vegetation starts early—and has a constantly succeeding crop of vegetation and flowering, if undisturbed, till fall, of an immense variety, yet, unlike the Indian, disputes occupancy with nothing—

The Indians when moving their towns carry the seed of the Green grass or *Poa trivialis*, which abounds in all settlements, with them and have an abundant crop— The ground without any other Culture than one ploughing will yield from 20 to 25—or I might more safely say 30 bushels of Wheat to the Acre— I have seen ground from one years ploughing from wild prairie yield 80 bushels [per†] acre— No Manure is ever required— Vincennes stands on the Margin of the Wabash, on a prairie of about 20,000 acres—that has been steadily worked for one hundred years<sup>27</sup> and is now as productive as ever— I have taken a farm on this Prairie about one Mile from town—200 acres of which is a complete green grass pasture for sheep—150 acres of it is ploughing ground which last year yielded 75 bushels to the Acre [*we are now sowing spring wheat*]<sup>28</sup>—favorable seasons it yields 80 bushels unfavorable 50—Oats from 30 to 40 bushels— On the edge of the prairie is the farm house, & 50 acres of orchard—pasture—sheep groves—that is termed “half clearing” on a high ground overlooking the prairie— Wabash &c. into the opposite territory for Miles—with the above 400 acres, [through] which runs a beautiful stream (and possesses one of those Mounds 300 yards in circumference at the base) with a Wood range, in a Sugar Orchard, of 400 acres more, for 200 dollars payable in Corn at 33 cents [per†] bushel—

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<sup>27</sup> Since Vincennes was not established by the French until about 1730, the land around it could not have been tilled for a hundred years.

<sup>28</sup> This bracketed sentence is written between the lines of Townes' letter.

After stating what I have in a general way you can have no doubt as to the course I intend pursuing— I am in treaty for 700 sheep and have about 150 coming on—every view of the country & circumstances confirm the opinions I held whilst with you—the Soil and Climate so far as I have seen is in a Word delightful [—] I never passed so beautiful a winter any where—the winds passing over the praries are pretty sharp, say cold if you please, but in the woods—in your house or under the least shelter you are not sensible to anything you can call *Cold*—but a great portion of the winter Season is really mild and pleasant—they say they have had less rain than usual—Though the *Coldest Winter* for 30 years—this Country has a climate [2?] deg[rees] warmer than the atlantic Country in same latitude. No body houses their Cattle

Let me congratulate you on the happy return of Peace—as far as has reached [us] it appears honorable—may it be lasting and may we with sincere acknowledgement to the author of all our blessings make a suitable return for this great, this important blessing— I had intended saying something of the Indians—they have been troublesome<sup>29</sup>—they are weak—they are pitiable if not contemptable [—] the English government have much to answer for their conduct to these unfortunate people— I have seen many of them who have been at war against us: and the measures the British have used with them are too dreadful to think of— I will only say on the subject now that they had determined on a simultaneous attack from the prarie du Chein<sup>30</sup>—to the Mouth

<sup>29</sup> There were several groups of Indians in the Vincennes area in 1815. Among them were the Kickapoo, Piankashaw, and Ouiatanon; among those farther north of Vincennes were the Ottawa, Miami, and the Potawatomi. These northerly tribes were treating with the United States agent at Vincennes in April, 1815. On numerous occasions from early March to the middle of May, 1815, deaths and captures were reported both south and north of Vincennes. Some of these may have been committed by "outlaw" bands of Indians. By March 25, 1815, the Rangers were in pursuit of the Indians to the south of Vincennes. For examples of reports of the "outrages," see the Vincennes *Western Sun*, March 4, 18, 25, April 8, May 13, 1815. (Microfilm copies in Indiana University Library, Bloomington, Ind.)

<sup>30</sup> Prairie du Chien, in Wisconsin on the eastern bank of the Mississippi a few miles north of the mouth of the Wisconsin River, was visited as early as 1680 by Europeans and had been captured by the British, Canadians, and Indians in July, 1814. It was abandoned in May, 1815, but for several years more was to be important in the contests with the Indians of the area.

of the Mississippi—4 small parties of 8 or 10 are on the head of White river on this business of stealing horses and killing off families but peace will check them—5000 are about to be sent to visit them, of mounted riflemen—which will put an end to their excursions— I have got to the extent of my limits—accept my acknowledgments of your fri[e]ndly attentions and assure yourselves that I am very respectfully

Your friend     *Caleb Townes.*

PS I shall be happy to hear from you as soon as you can make it convenient—

I may trouble you with another line. I have much yet to say to you respecting this country—

Oliver Wolcott, Esq

Col George Gibbs—