

Elizabeth Comstock to John P. St. John

In this letter Elizabeth Comstock, a former agent of the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association, relates her experiences during her visit to the East coast in 1881. Comstock and some of her New York colleagues had the opportunity to speak with President James Garfield, giving him four main points to consider regarding the Exodus movement. According to her letter, Garfield was devoted to aiding black refugees. She also wrote of other matters, including how some blacks in southern Kansas were displeased about the dissolution of the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association; in contrast, Comstock believed the demise of this association had some positive repercussions.

Creator: Comstock, Elizabeth

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Hotel.
DONALD, . . . PROPRIETOR.

Gov St John Portland, Me., 6. 16. 1881

My dear Friend

My visit to Pres Garfield accompanied by a dignified delegation of New York Friends has been satisfactory. I laid before him 4 points to which we thought it important to secure his attention & claim his interest & influence.

- 1st The importance of protecting the colored people at home, in the South.
- 2nd The plan of a national organization in some older State than Kas. as a relief assn & distribution point.
- 3rd A tract of land for them some where, & aid to make a fair start in the world.
- 4th The re-enactment of a law for the admission, duty free, of supplies from England, Canada & (of donations).

Pres Garfield gave me half an hour of his valuable time, asked many questions

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manifested lively interest in the refugees & in our noble Gov^r of Kansas, who is so true a friend to the oppressed. He has promised to do all in his power to bring about my wishes & facilitate my plans for their elevation.

Our Friends in New York & New England are entering with lively interest into our efforts for their elevation. They encourage the "Agricultural & Training Instⁿ" near Columbus, & think with thee that it is better to teach them to be self sustaining than to pauperize them by feeding & clothing them in idleness, & that all props should be knocked from under them during the summer season.

I was very thankful upon receiving thy letter of the 16 Ult. to find that all was working so well in Topeka & that the dissolution of the K. F. R. A. had resulted in so much good. I wish the colored people in Sou. Kas. could feel the same. By the little circular I sent thee, thou wilt see what a commotion they are making. They have fiercely attacked our

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excellent friends J. E. Pickering & son & the "Agricultural & Training Inst^e" charging them with the "misappropriation of funds" & various other charges without any foundation. I think we shall have to call upon thee to back us, & to assure the grumblers & the public that we have not drawn a dollar of the funds from the Treasury of the K. F. R. A. for the Institute. Thou advises me to "draw out the money & pack up the goods & go".

I did not feel any freedom to draw out the money, on the contrary, I called in all the bills that I received & paid them & handed into their treasurer's hands, \$2221.11 (Two thousand two hundred & 21 ¹¹/₁₀₀) after they gave me that countel. \$500 of which I stipulated with the treasurer should be returned to me (as it was given for my Homestead fund) when the assigners of the K. F. R. A. had settled their business & sold their buildings.

By our March report thou wilt see that a Bal was on hand in the Treasurer's hands \$2936. ⁹⁶/₁₀₀. I considered my commission with the K. F. R. A. closed then, but remained a few days longer to pack up & say farewell.

I went to Columbus & placed in the hands of the Com^{ee} of Kas J. Meeting of Friends the bal of my "Homestead fund" on hand, a few hundred dollars, & \$500 that had been sent to me with a special request to use it in a way that I thought would best promote the permanent welfare of the colored people. With this & such additions as have since been sent to me for the purpose we had tried to start the "Agri & Ind^l Inst^e" & while the effort has been met with thy approval, & warmly encouraged by our Eastern & English Friends, the colored people themselves have violently opposed. Many of these are the self same disturbers

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of the peace, who were so discontented in Topeka. Who told the people that "the Govt sent all those Bibles & Bibles for them & paid us large salaries to distribute them". They clamorously claimed them as a right, refused to go to places offered them to work, & said "We've worked for white people long enough, we are going to work for ourselves now". I fear you will have great trouble with this element, unless they are speedily put down. 150 left Topeka about the time, or soon after, we did. They went to Dan^e. Votaw, whose kind heart has been moved by their pitiful stories, & he has believed what they have said, taken their part, helped them to get up this circular, he continues to give them food & clothing this warm weather, as far as he can find the means.

I hear that he has recently distributed among these discontented people, a whole car load, of valuable clothing, bedding, & shoes that we had stored there against next winter. I believe he is a kind hearted honest man, easily imposed upon, & wanting in judgment & sanctified common sense.

I am inflicting upon thee a long letter, but I thought it was right thou shouldst know these facts & also that those valuable buildings in No. Topeka have been sold for only \$12.00. (Twelve Hundred)!!

H. W. Rust has gone to California before he went he sent me his of \$306.⁸⁰/₁₀₀ for freight storage &c. Bills are coming in from other agents for same. I am paying them all as fast as I can. With kind love to thyself & wife

Thy sincere friend

Address

Elizth Comstock.

% Mr. J. H. Ross, Belleville, Canada West. for 2 weeks.