# John C. McCoy to Franklin G. Adams

In this item, from John C. McCoy to Franklin G. Adams of the Kansas State Historical Society, McCoy discusses his early experiences in Kansas. McCoy, who came to Kansas City in 1830 to perform missionary work with his father Isaac McCoy and mother Christiana McCoy, was an active figure throughout Kansas from 1830 until his death in 1889. In this letter to Adams, McCoy relates the details of people he came into contact with, including a number of Native Americans.

Creator: McCoy, John Calvin, 1811-1889

Date: February 09, 1885

Callnumber: Indian History Coll. #590 Box 1 Folder Lands: McCoy, John Calvin. Field notes. Sept. 20, 1837

KSHS Identifier: DaRT ID: 219391

Item Identifier: 219391

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# John C. McCoy to Franklin G. Adams

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Indians
Gen. Hon. F. G. Adams
Lands

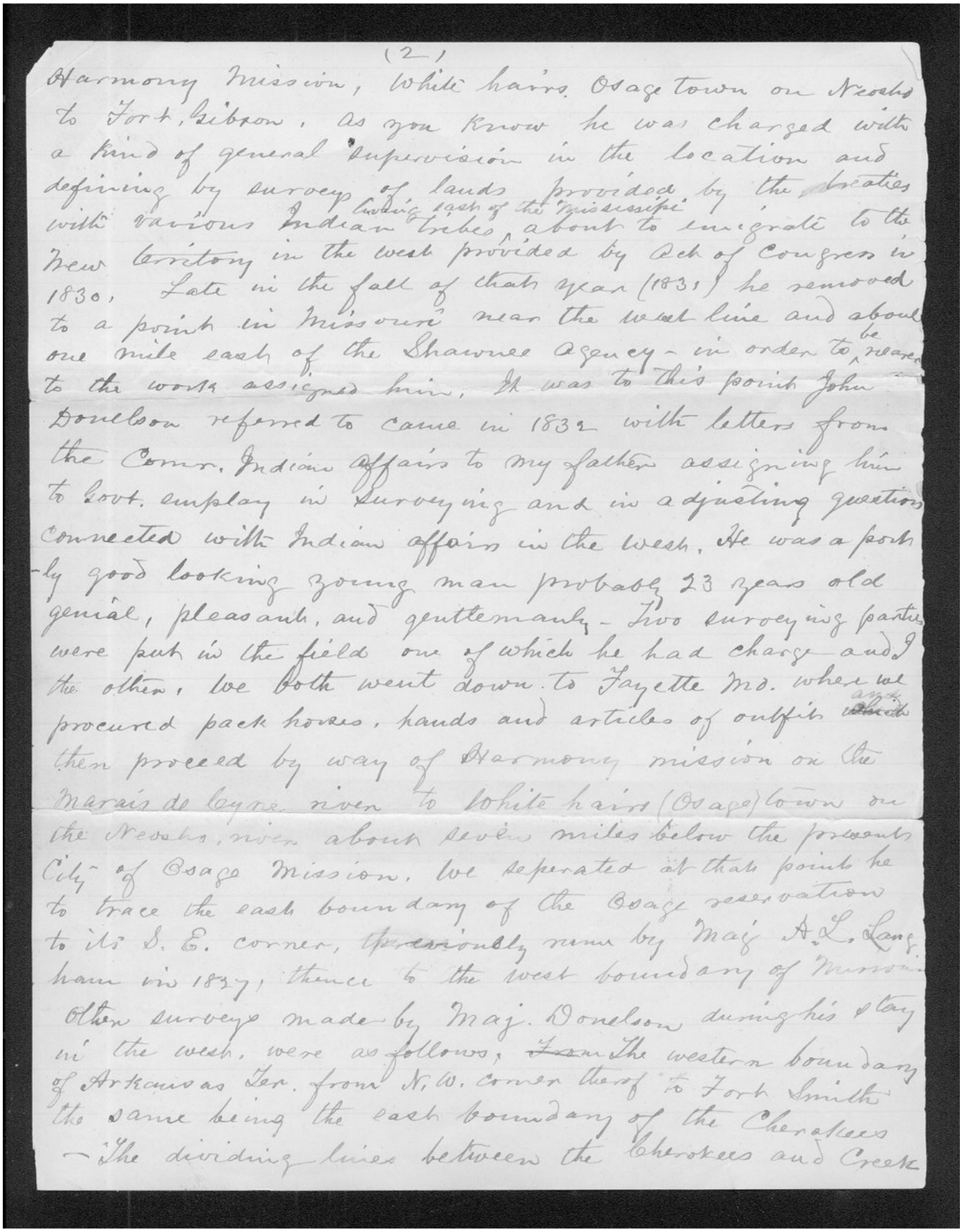
McCoy, John Calvin

Chouteau Kas
July 9 - 1885

Dear Sir

I have received your letter dated the 6th inst inquiring as to my recollection of a Mr. Donelson who figured somewhat in early Kansas times. A. J. Donelson to whom you refer was a cousin of John Donelson who in 1832 was engaged in making surveys of Indian boundaries in Kansas but more especially in what is now known as the Indian territory and in connection with my father Isaac McCoy in adjusting various matters connected with the settlements of the immigrant tribes in the then new Indian Territory - Both of the above named were nephews of Mrs. Gen. Jackson whose family name was Donelson. A. J. Donelson was private secretary of president Jackson during the last if not both of his presidential terms, a prominent personage during and after that service - connected with the diplomatic service &c.

John Donelson who as stated figured somewhat in early Kansas was the older of two orphan nephews of Mrs. Gen Jackson both raised by her and (in the absence of children of his own) the younger one with name changed to Andrew Jackson Junior was adopted in legal form by the General as heir. - It is a fact perhaps not generally known that Gen. Jackson whilst president could not to his knowledge claim a living soul as kindred by blood This fact was so stated by him to my father in the many interviews between them. In 1832 My father in compliance with a commission and instructions from Maj. Eaton Sec. War moved with his family, hired help and surveying outfit from Howard County Mo. by way of Boonville

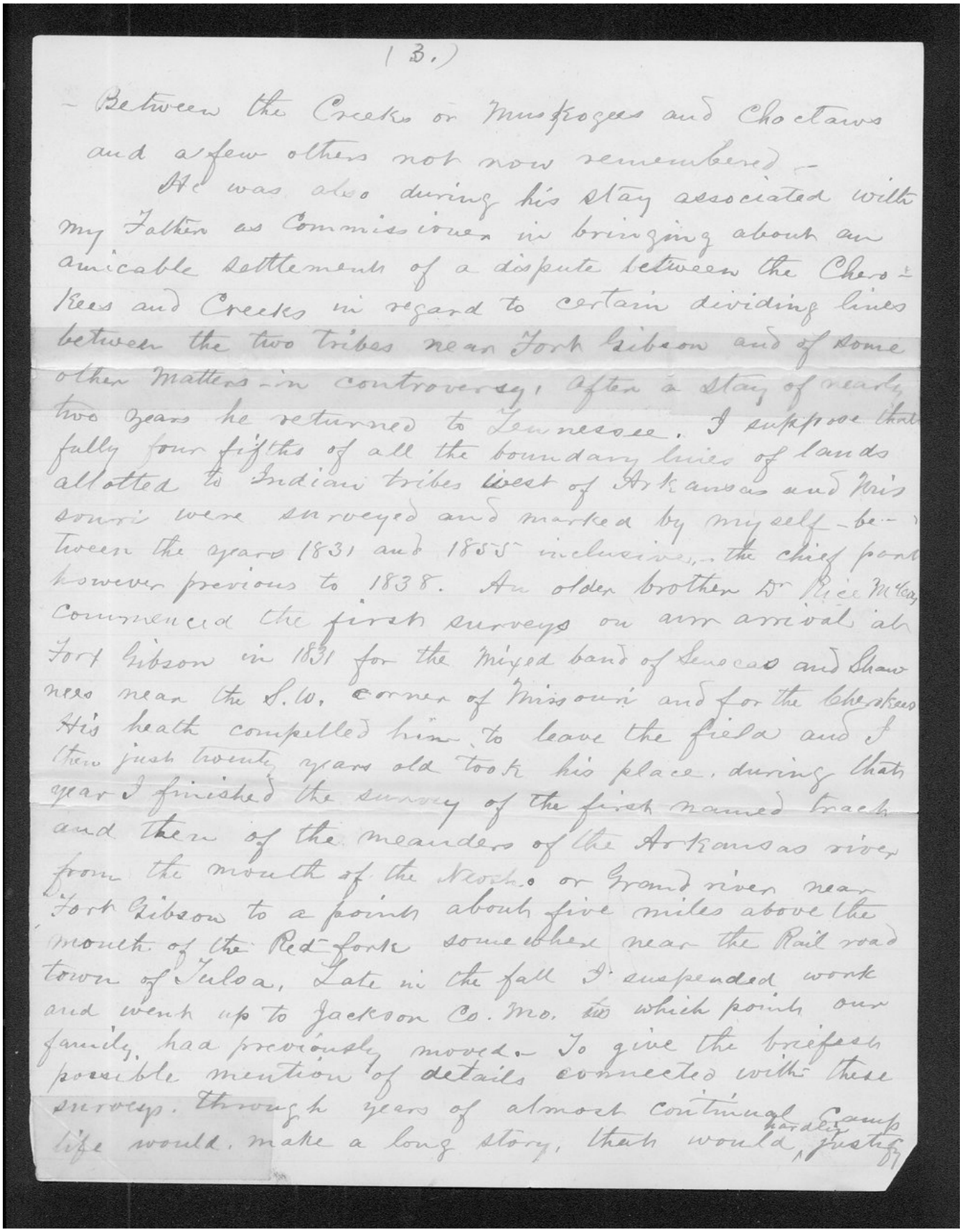


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Harmony Mission, White hairs Osage town on Neosho to Fort Gibson. as you know he was charged with a kind of general supervision in the location and defining by surveys of lands provided by the treaties with various Indian tribes, (west side) about to emigrate to the New territory in the west provided by Act of Congress in 1830. Late in the fall of that year (1831) he removed to a point in Missouri near the west line and about one mile east of the Shawnee Agency - in order to be nearer to the work assigned him. It was to this point John Donelson referred to came in 1832 with letters from the Comr. Indian affairs to my father assigning him to Govt. employ in surveying and in adjusting questions connected with Indian affairs in the west. He was a portly good looking young man probably 23 years old genial, pleasant, and gentlemanly - Two surveying parties were put in the field one of which he had charge and I the other, we both went down to Fayette Mo. where we procured pack horses, hands and articles of outfits and then proceed by way of Harmony mission on the Marais de Cygne river to White hairs (Osage) town on the Neosho, river about seven miles below the present City of Osage Mission. We seperated at that point he to trace the east boundary of the Osage reservation to its S. E. corner, previously run by Maj A. L. Langham in 1827, thence to the west boundary of Missouri

Other surveys made by Maj. Donelson during his stay in the west, were as follows, ~~From~~ The western boundary of Arkansas Ter. from N. W. corner thereof to Fort Smith the same being the east boundary of the Cherokees - The dividing lines between the Cherokees and Creek

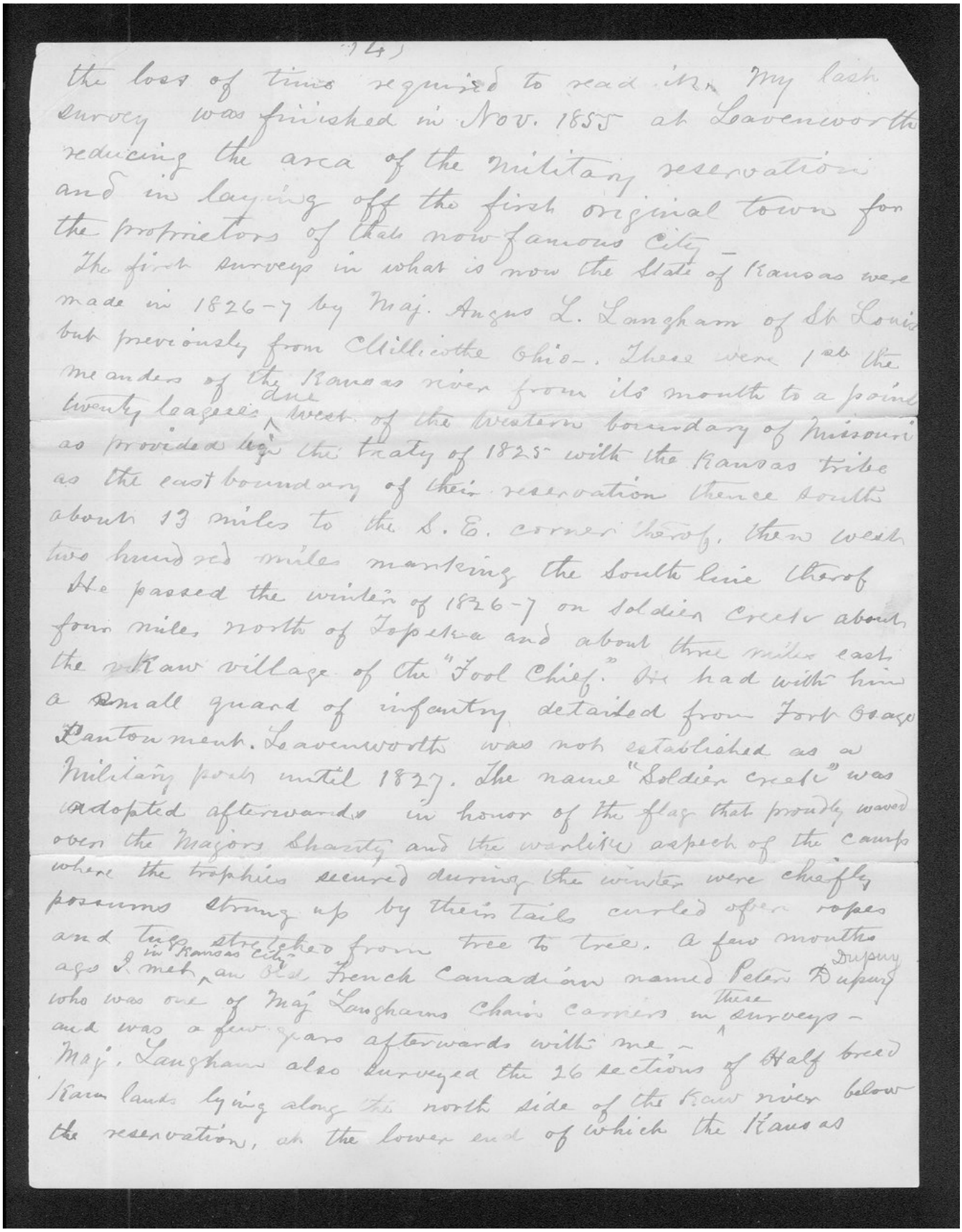
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(3.)

– Between the Creeks or Muskogees and Choctaws and a few others not now remembered –

He was also during his stay associated with my Father as Commissioner in bringing about an amicable settlement of a dispute between the Cherokees and Creeks in regard to certain dividing lines between the two tribes near Fort Gibson and of some other matters in controversy. After a stay of nearly two years he returned to Tennessee. I suppose that fully four fifths of all the boundary lines of lands allotted to Indian tribes west of Arkansas and Missouri were surveyed and marked by myself – between the years 1831 and 1855 inclusive, – the chief portion however previous to 1838. An older brother Dr Rice McCoy commenced the first surveys on our arrival at Fort Gibson in 1831 for the Mixed band of Senecas and Shawnees near the S.W. corner of Missouri and for the Cherokees His health compelled him to leave the field and I then just twenty years old took his place. during that year I finished the survey of the first named tract and then of the meanders of the Arkansas river from the mouth of the Neosho or Grand river near Fort Gibson to a point about five miles above the mouth of the Red fork somewhere near the Rail road town of Tulsa. Late in the fall I suspended work and went up to Jackson Co. Mo. to which point our family had previously moved. To give the briefest possible mention of details connected with these surveys. through years of almost continual Camp life would make a long story, that would hardly justify



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the loss of time required to read it. My last survey was finished in Nov. 1855 at Leavenworth reducing the area of the Military reservation and in laying off the first original town for the proprietors of that now famous City.

The first surveys in what is now the State of Kansas were made in 1826-7 by Maj. Angus L. Langham of St Louis but previously from Chillicothe Ohio. These were 1st the meanders of the Kansas river from its mouth to a point twenty leagues due west of the Western boundary of Missouri as provided by the treaty of 1825 with the Kansas tribe as the east boundary of their reservation thence south about 13 miles to the S. E. corner thereof, then west two hundred miles marking the South line thereof He passed the winter of 1826-7 on Soldier Creek about four miles north of Topeka and about three miles east the Kaw village of the "Fool Chief." He had with him a small guard of infantry detailed from Fort Osage Cantonment. Leavenworth was not established as a Military post until 1827. The name "Soldier Creek" was adopted afterwards in honor of the flag that proudly waved over the Majors shanty and the warlike aspect of the camp where the trophies secured during the winter were chiefly possums strung up by their tails curled over ropes and tugs stretched from tree to tree. A few months ago I met in Kansas City an old French Canadian named Peter Dupuy who was one of Maj Langhams Chain carriers in these surveys - and was a few years afterwards with me -

Maj. Langham also surveyed the 26 sections of Half breed Kaw lands lying along the north side of the Kaw river below the reservation, at the lower end of which the Kansas

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agency was established during that last year 1827
by Baronet Vasques Sub. Ind. Agent and Daniel M. Boon
appointed farmer for Kansas Tribe

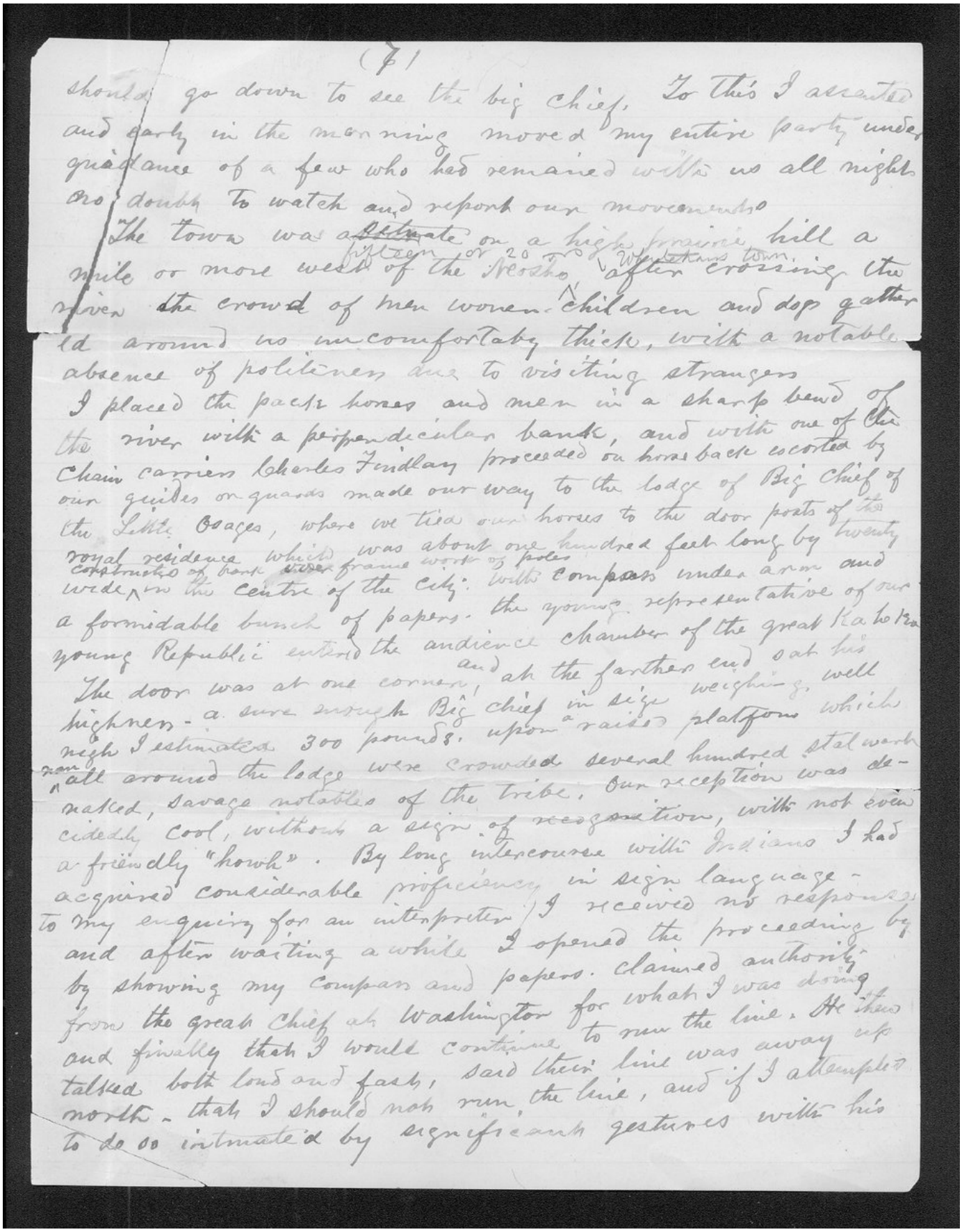
Other surveys made by Maj. Langham in 1827 were
as follows. viz 1st The east and about twenty miles of the
south lines of lands assigned by treaty to immigrants
Shawnees, 2d a track of fifteen miles by about 16 or 18 miles
adjoining the Shawnees South for the Weas and Piankeshaws
and 3d partly finished the survey of another smaller
track, adjoining west on the west for the Peorias and Kaskaskias, and also the east
boundary of the Osage reservation and the southern as far
west as the Arkansas river, and this comprises the
sum of all the surveys made by Maj. Langham in
Kansas, I have the impression that his instructions included
a survey of the north line of the Osage reservation as far
west as the Arkansas river, I know that his work was
left unfinished in consequence of the opposition and hostile
Conduct of the Osages, From time immemorial the Osages
were known as restless troublesome outlaws, not particularly
dangerous to life but decidedly so to property of any kind
especially horses that fell in their way, They neither knew
nor wanted to know where the lines of their reservation ran
and when they saw the lines of demarcation being drawn
so near them they determined to prevent him from defining
any lines, While in camp writing one day a large party of
naked, painted, yelling Osages came suddenly upon a Colored
employe who happed to be some distance from camp. He of
course broke for camp, both the yelling Savages were
with him administering blows with ram rods bows &c

~~The within order is hereby accepted and approved~~ (6) with

in a ceaseless torrent at every jump, at Camp they ~~made~~ no halt but in a solid phalanx dashed through trampling down tents camp fixtures and the Major with writing apparatus rolled to the ground and then wound up the demonstration in an impromptu war dance - and an emphatic demand for him and his party to vamose X

In 1836 I surveyed and marked this north line of the reservation from the N. E. corner west to the Arkansas river about 85 miles and met with treatment from the Osages very similar to that experienced by Maj. L. like him I had no military escort. only seven or eight poorly armed men - The trouble was that the north line crossed the Neosho only about three miles above the Chief town of Osages numbering nearly 3000 souls - curtailing their tribal limits much more than they ever anticipated. From time out of mind the Osages and Kaws were almost the sole occupants of the vast region extending from the Mississipi river between the Missouri and Arkansas west ward indefinitely - With their vague ideas of land rights, dimensions and treaty obligations no wonder that at their reluctance defining limits to their possessory rights - Many miles before I reached the river Neosho we were met by numbers of young men on horse back. with only the usual courtesies commonly exchanged between the Look-soh-she and the Mosh-he-tow-ga (American) viz. first an emphatic "how" from each party and secondly an urgent request for tobacco or any thing else in sight - we were liberal with our tobacco so much so that we suffered in want of it the balance of the trip - before reaching Camp near the Neosho I began to realize that the there was trouble ahead - as a protest was made against our further progress, and a request that I

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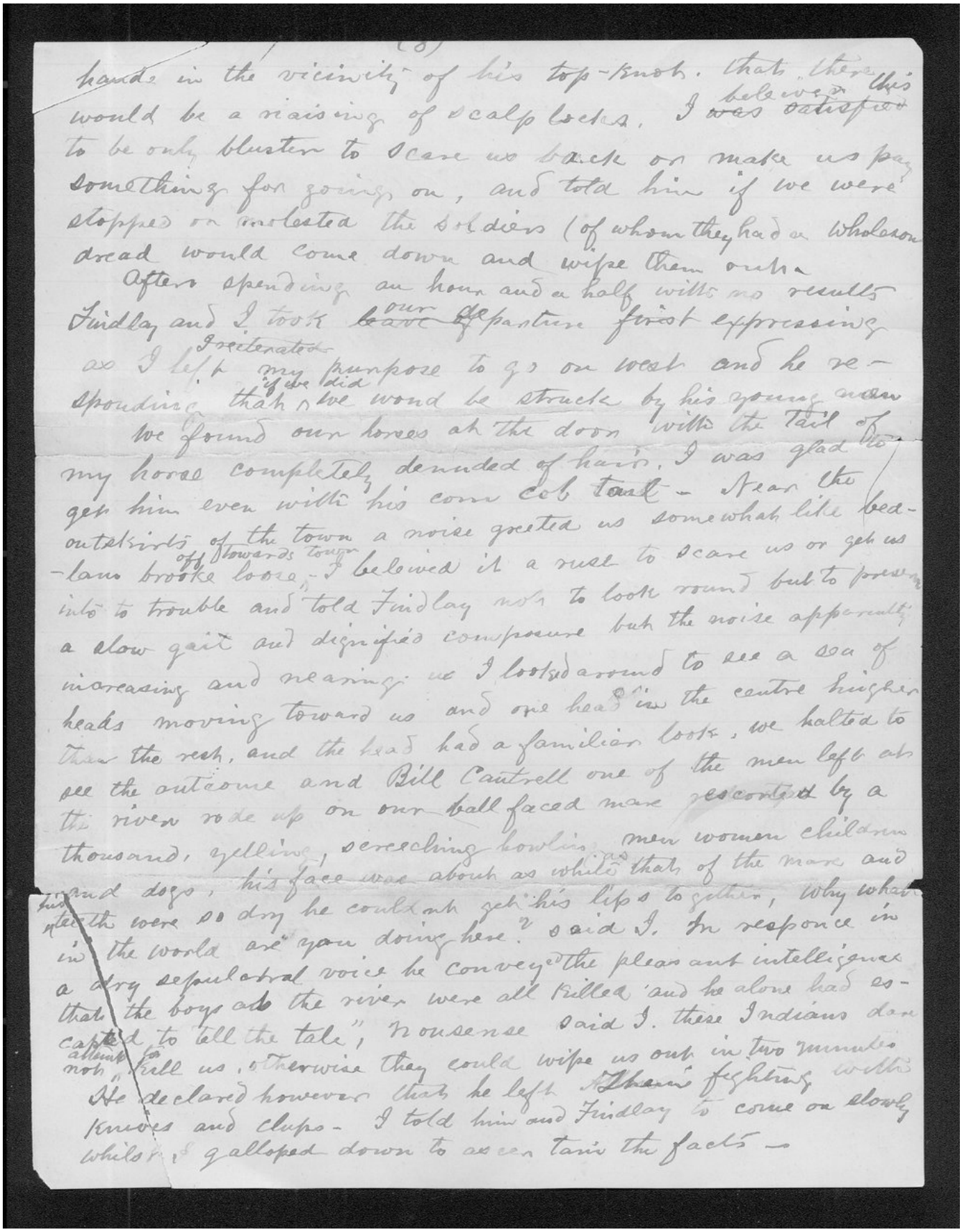
should go down to see the big chief. To this I acceded and early in the morning moved my entire party under guidance of a few who had remained with us all night no doubt to watch and report our movements.

The town was ~~situate~~ on a high prairie hill a mile or more west of the Neosho fifteen or 20 ~~rods~~ after crossing the river the crowd of men women children and dogs gathered around us uncomfortably thick, with a notable absence of politeness due to visiting strangers.

I placed the pack horses and men in a sharp bend of the river with a perpendicular bank, and with one of the Chain carriers Charles Findlay proceeded on horseback escorted by our guides or guards made our way to the lodge of Big Chief of the Little Osages, where we tied our horses to the door posts of the royal residence which was about one hundred feet long by twenty wide ~~on~~ in the centre of the city. ~~Constructed of bark over frame work of poles~~ With compass under arm and a formidable bunch of papers the young representative of our young Republic entered the audience chamber of the great Kah-he-ga

The door was at one corner and at the farther end sat his highness - a sure enough Big chief in size weighing well nigh I estimated 300 pounds upon a raised platform which now all around the lodge were crowded several hundred stalwart naked, savage notables of the tribe. Our reception was decidedly cool, without a sign of recognition, with not even a friendly "howh". By long intercourse with Indians I had acquired considerable proficiency in sign language - to my enquiry for an interpreter I received no response and after waiting a while I opened the proceedings by showing my compass and papers. claimed authority from the great Chief at Washington for what I was doing and finally that I would continue to run the line. He then talked both loud and fast, said their line was away up north - that I should not run the line, and if I attempted to do so intimated by significant gestures with his

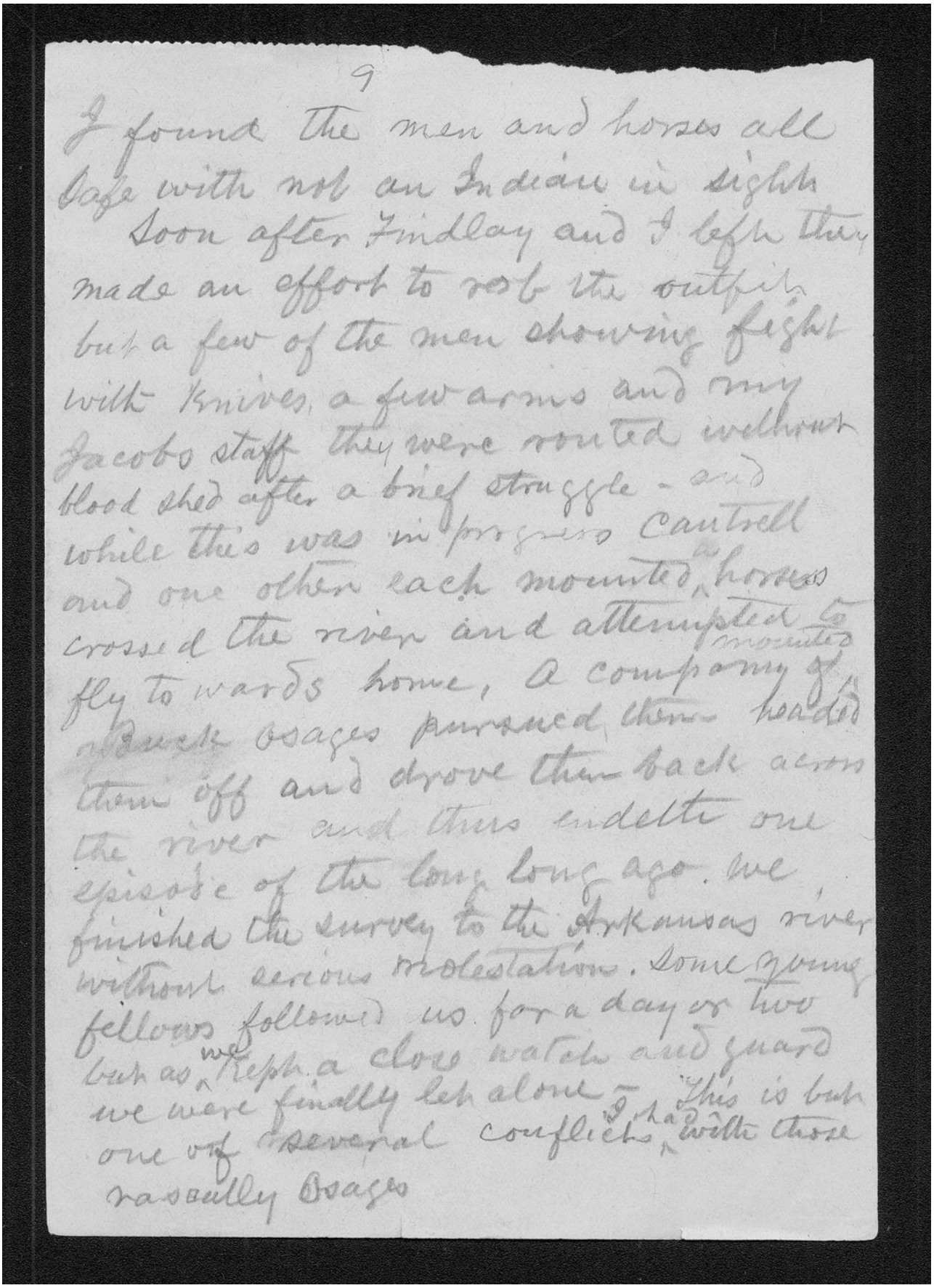
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hands in the vicinity of his top-knot. that there would be a raising of scalp locks. I believe this was satisfactory to be only bluster to scare us back or make us pay something for going on, and told him if we were stopped or molested the soldiers (of whom they had a wholesome dread would come down and wipe them out.

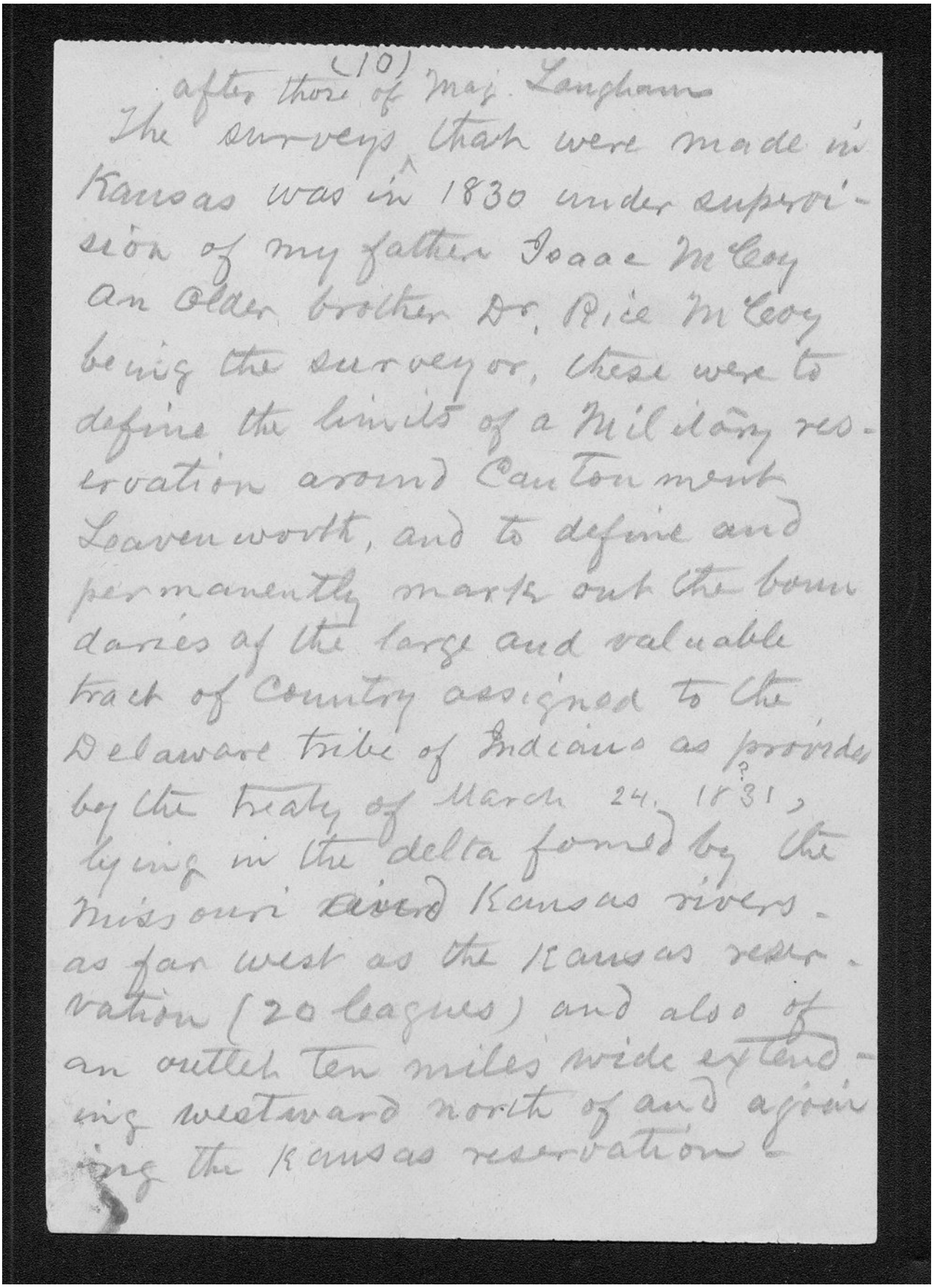
After spending an hour and a half with no results Findlay and I took our leave of the pasture first expressing as I left my intention purpose to go on west and he responding that if he did we would be struck by his young mare

We found our horses at the door with the tail of my horse completely denuded of hair. I was glad to get him even with his corn cob tail - Near the outskirts of the town a noise greeted us somewhat like bedlam broke loose - I believed it a ruse to scare us or get us into trouble and told Findlay not to look round but to preserve a slow gait and dignified composure but the noise apparently increasing and nearing me I looked around to see a sea of heads moving toward us and one head in the centre higher than the rest, and the head had a familiar look, we halted to see the outcome and Bill Cantrell one of the men left at the river rode up on our ball faced mare escorted by a thousand, yelling, screeching howling men women children and dogs, his face was about as white as that of the mare and he was so dry he could not get his lips together, Why what in the world are you doing here? said I. In response in a dry sepulchral voice he conveyed the pleasant intelligence that the boys at the river were all killed and he alone had escaped to tell the tale", Nonsense said I. these Indians dare not attempt to kill us, otherwise they could wipe us out in two minutes He declared however that he left them fighting with knives and clubs - I told him and Findlay to come on slowly whilst I galloped down to ascertain the facts -



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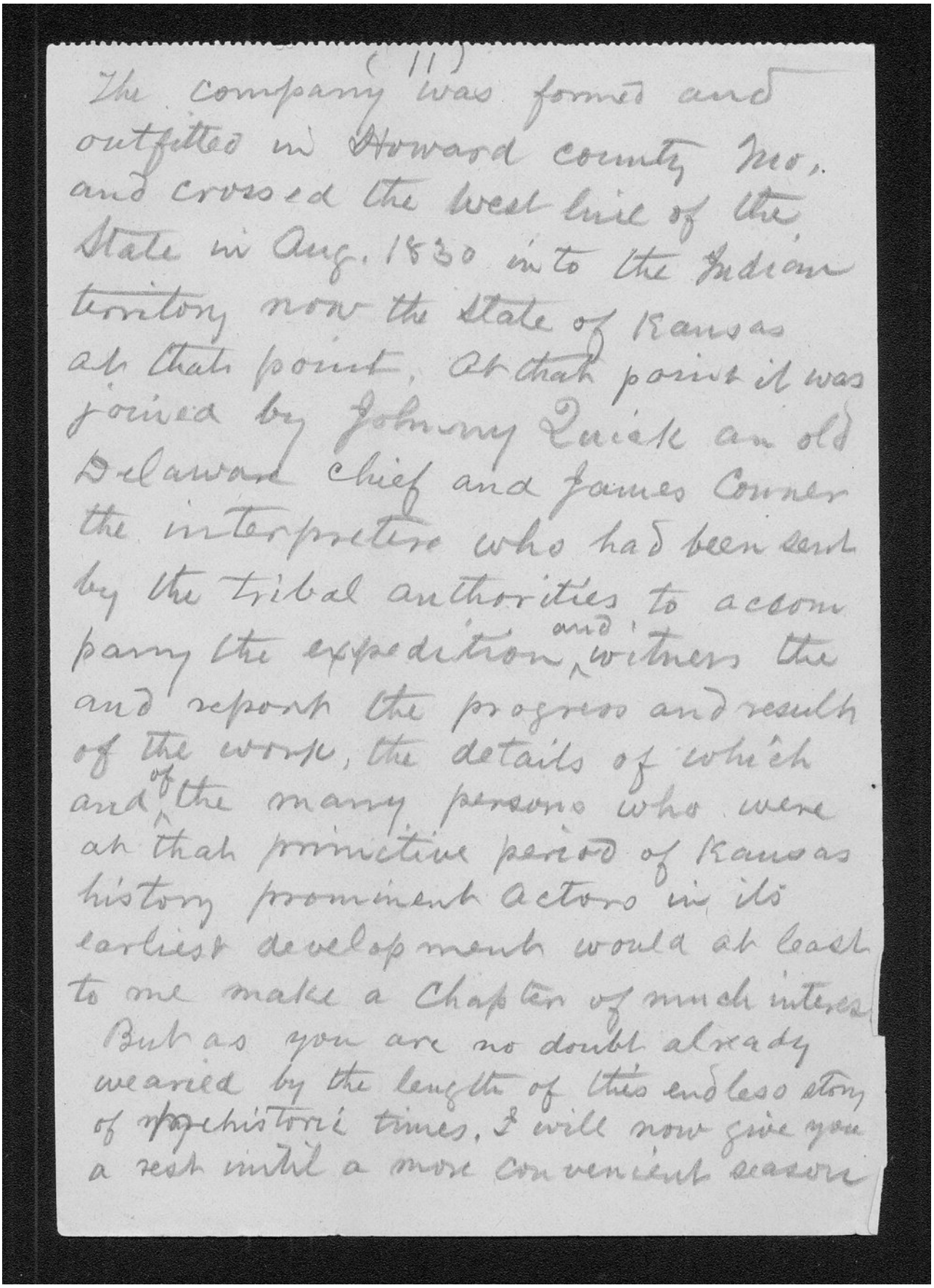
I found the men and horses all safe with not an Indian in sight. Soon after Findlay and I left they made an effort to rob the outfit but a few of the men showing fight with knives, a few arms and my Jacobs staff they were routed without blood shed after a brief struggle - and while this was in progress Cantrell and one other each mounted a horse crossed the river and attempted to fly towards home, a company of Black Osages pursued them headed them off and drove them back across the river and thus ended one episode of the long long ago. We finished the survey to the Arkansas river without serious molestation. Some young fellows followed us for a day or two but as we kept a close watch and guard we were finally left alone. This is but one of several conflicts I had with those rascally Osages



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after those of Maj. Langham

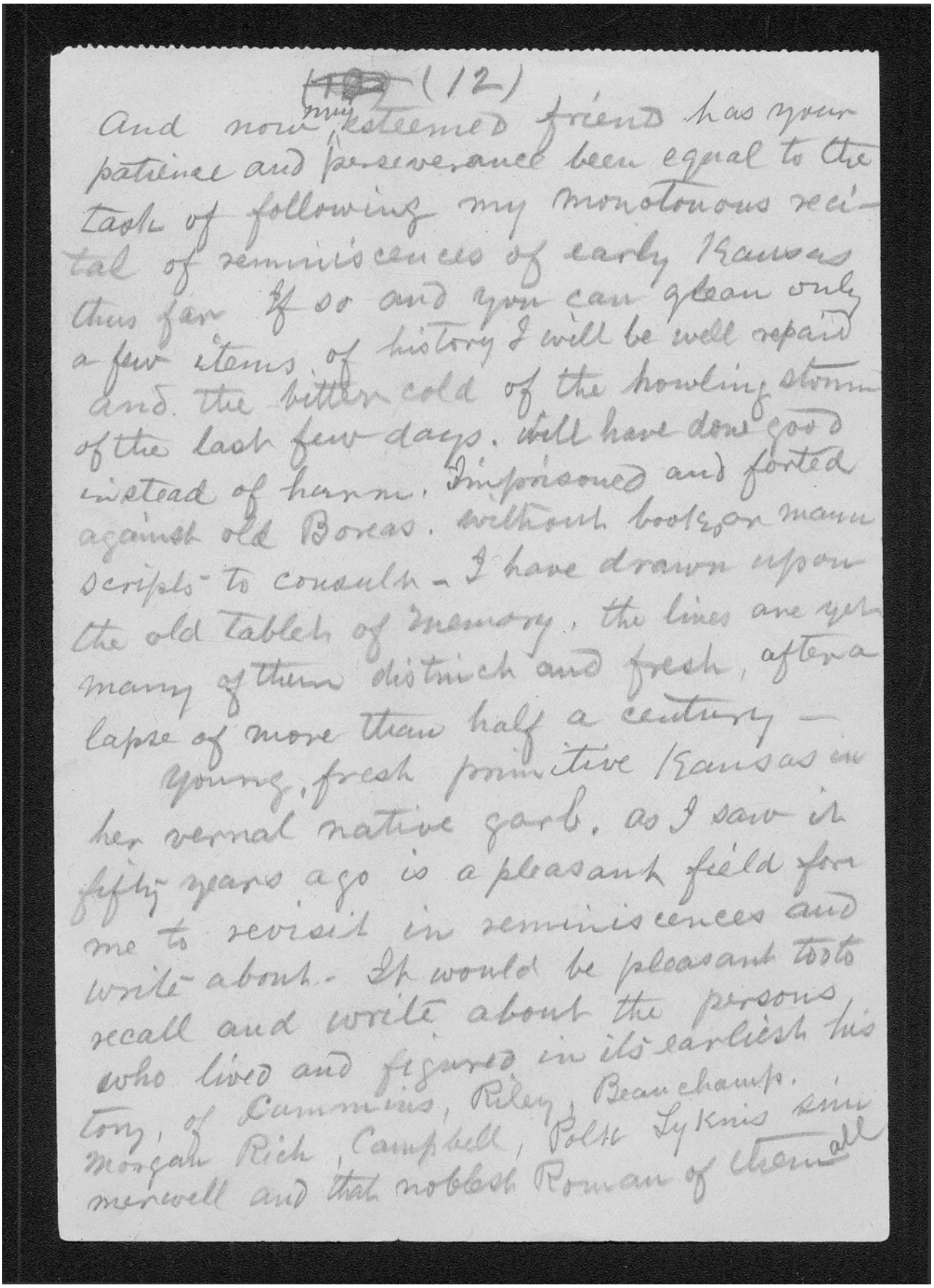
The surveys that were made in Kansas was in 1830 under supervision of my father Isaac McCoy an older brother Dr. Rice McCoy being the surveyor, these were to define the limits of a Military reservation around Cantonment Leavenworth, and to define and permanently mark out the boundaries of the large and valuable tract of country assigned to the Delaware tribe of Indians as provided by the treaty of March 24, 1831, lying in the delta formed by the Missouri River Kansas rivers. as far west as the Kansas reservation (20 leagues) and also of an outlet ten miles wide extending westward north of and adjoining the Kansas reservation.



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The company was formed and outfitted in Howard county Mo., and crossed the west line of the State in Aug. 1830 into the Indian territory now the State of Kansas at that point. At that point it was joined by Johnny Luick an old Delaward chief and James Conner the interpreter who had been sent by the tribal authorities to accompany the expedition and witness the and report the progress and result of the work, the details of which and of the many persons who were at that primitive period of Kansas history prominent actors in its earliest development would at least to me make a Chapter of much interest.

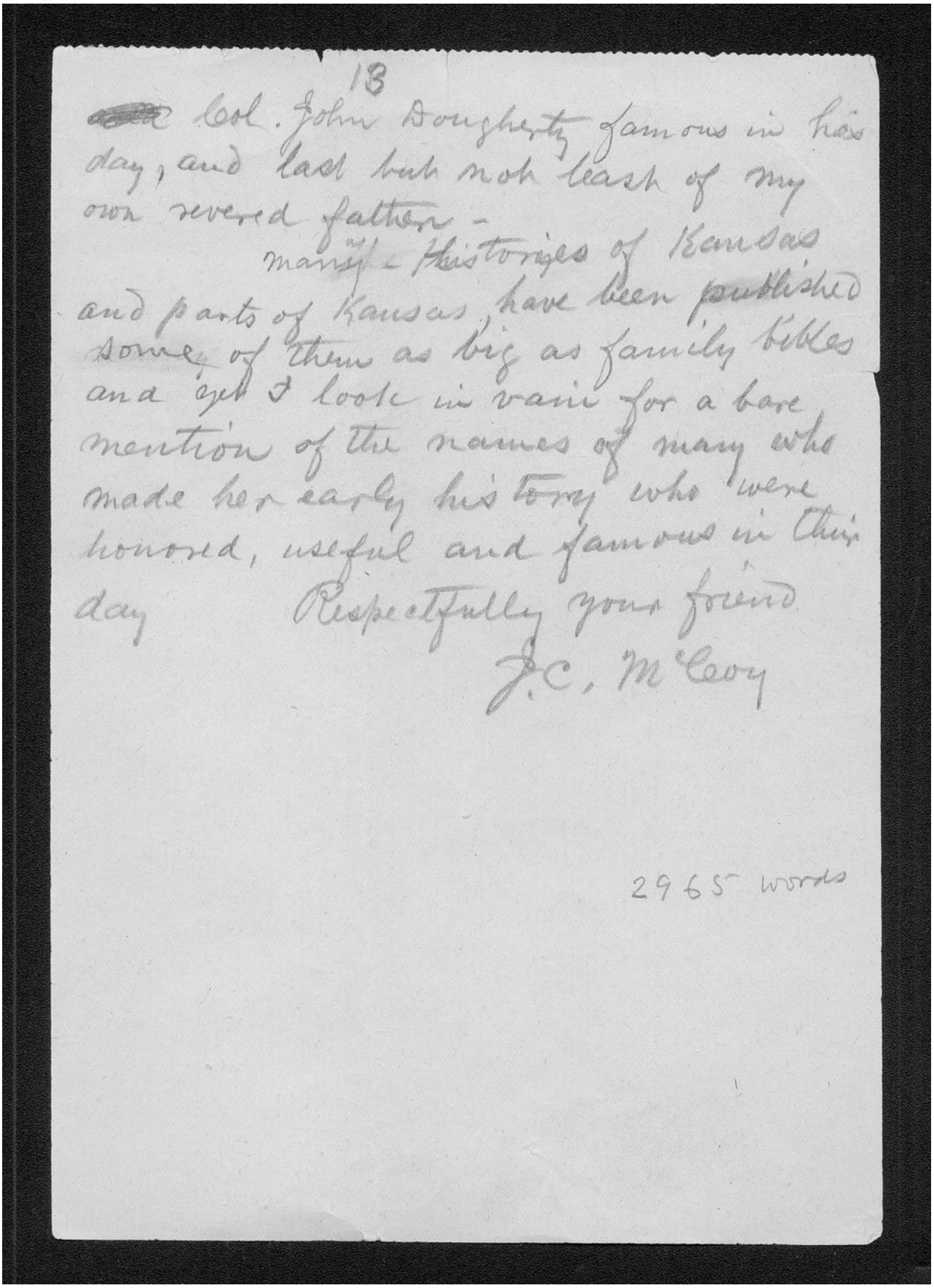
But as you are no doubt already wearied by the length of this endless story of prehistoric times, I will now give you a rest until a more convenient season



(12)

And now my esteemed friend has your patience and perseverance been equal to the task of following my monotonous recital of reminiscences of early Kansas thus far If so and you can glean only a few items of history I will be well repaid and the bitter cold of the howling storm of the last few days will have done good instead of harm. Imprisoned and forted against old Boreas. without books or manuscripts to consult - I have drawn upon the old tablets of memory, the lines are yet many of them distinct and fresh, after a lapse of more than half a century —

Young, fresh primitive Kansas in her vernal native garb, as I saw it fifty years ago is a pleasant field for me to revisit in reminiscences and write about. It would be pleasant too to recall and write about the persons who lived and figured in its earliest history, of Cummins, Riley, Beauchamp, Morgan Rich, Campbell, Colt Lykins Sim merwell and that nobbish Roman of them all



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~~Col~~ Col. John Dougherty famous in his day, and last but not least of my own revered father -

many ~~of~~ histories of Kansas and parts of Kansas, have been published some of them as big as family bibles and yet I look in vain for a bare mention of the names of many who made her early history who were honored, useful and famous in their day

Respectfully your friend

J.C. McCoy

2965 words