

Drifting Goose

One band of this tribe under Drifting Goose, about twenty years ago, lived and followed the buffalo on the James River, where they also planted a little corn. These largely intermarried with and became closely related to the Sissetons. A few years ago Drifting Goose and his band left Crow Creek and encamped on the James midway between the two agencies, from both of which they managed in some way to keep supplied. They planted a little corn at a place known as the Earth Lodges, and contributed a little to their subsistence by hunting. At the beginning of winter they separated in small parties and went to the agencies on the Missouri and east of the James and to Devil's Lake and returned in the spring to the Summer camp. This precarious mode of life led the boldest of them into occasional depredations, and several of them became implicated in some murders that took place in Minnesota and near Fort Totten.

The settlers approaching the James River from the direction of Minnesota and from the Union Pacific Railroad were kept in fear and apprehension of them and complained much of their presence, and two surveying parties were driven away and an outrage committed upon one of them. Some of the settlers left their claims, while others remained and opened a contraband trade with the band. Accordingly, in September last, having received orders from the department to bring these Indians to the agency, it was done after some trouble. Last spring two lodges under Drifting Goose's brother stole away from the agency and returned to the old camp and found the place occupied by white settlers. Some corn and other property that they had cached when they came in had been stolen, and the bad feeling arising from this state of affairs came near causing a disturbance, which was averted by the presence of a small party of troops sent to the spot by the commanding officer at Fort Sisseton. The Indians came back to Crow Creek and finally agreed to remain here and abandon the James, but a few days subsequently an executive order was made reserving for this band three townships near the Earth Lodges, and instructions were sent me from the office to sent them back to report to Agent Crissey, of Sisseton, to enable him to locate the families on the subdivisions of the land reserved for them on the James, which was done on the 4th instant.

On the 13th I received information from Mr. Crissy, dated at the Earth Lodges, that the band did not report promptly and that he experienced some difficulty in allotting the land, which was mostly occupied by white settlers, and also that the Indians manifested an indisposition to return to Crow Creek to await the determination of the department in regard to the settlers occupying the reserved land. I went immediately to the James River and took with me supplies enough to bring the band back to Crow Creek. I found the Indians in a very haughty and insubordinate mood and demanding the expulsion of the settlers, some of whom had watonly given offense last spring by stealing some property cached by the band when it was brought in last fall. The chief, who is under the influence of the turbulent and refractory men of the band, peremptorily refused to return to Crow Creek, claiming that he does not belong there, and ordered the people to strike the camp and depart for the Sisseton reservation. The band being without supplies I issued rations for two days to prevent depredations upon the settlers, who appeared to be excited and apprehensive of trouble in consequence of an offense committed the day before by four young men of the band. To the prudent management of Agent Crissey is mainly to be attributed the preservation of good order. The remainder of the tribe manifest no interest whatever in the movement of this band from the agency and appear to have very little sympathy with it. Some of them openly opposed it.