

between Louisiana and the Spanish dominions and the investigation of the resources of the arid plains that lay beyond the settlements, where were said to be herds of cattle and horses, salines without number and mines of silver and gold, seemed to warrant such an enterprise. In the same message in which he announced Lewis and Clark's achievements to Congress (February 19, 1806), Jefferson communicated the results of this less brilliant but no less significant exploration. Dr. John Sibley had been commissioned to ascend the Red River, while William Dunbar and George Hunter were sent up its principal tributary, the Washita.⁸

In an open boat, accompanied by a French half-breed, Francis Grappe, Dr. Sibley pushed up the Red River to Natchitoches, the old French settlement, and seventy miles beyond to near the present site of Shreveport. All along the right or north bank he found American settlers, developing cotton farms. There were two French towns on the south bank of the river, Izavial, with two hundred and ninety-six families, and Rapide, with one hundred. The land was very rich and bore heavy crops of corn and cotton. "It is perfectly level, resembling a river bed, the soil twenty feet deep, and like a bed of manure." "It is impossible to conceive of more beautiful fields and plantations, or more luxuriant crops of corn, cotton and tobacco." Sibley described the country below Natchitoches as the richest he had ever seen. "The low grounds of Red River are generally five or six miles wide, and no soil can be richer, and nearly all alike; considerable part of which is overflowed