

Ivins and the Shebits Indians
Salt Lake Tribune, October 7, 1890

The “Shebits” Indians

Complaint of Them From St. George and Citizens’ Petition

Letter of Mr. Ivans in Transmissal

Delegate Caine’s Letter to the Indian Commissioner - An Agent Appointed to Go and Investigate

George W. Parker, special agent of the Indian Department, was in the city yesterday on his way to Washington county, Utah, to investigate complaints made by citizens concerning the Shebits Indians. The following correspondence fully explains his mission:

OFFICE OF ASSESSOR AND COLLECTOR,
WASHINGTON COUNTY,
St. George, Utah, June 30, 1890

Hon. John T. Caine, Washington, D. C. :

DEAR SIR: At a meeting of citizens of St. George and vicinity, recently held, the subject of making application to the Government to take some steps to provide for the Shebits Indians was discussed and finally referred to a committee consisting of D. D. McArthur, Erastus B. Snow and myself.

The two former have asked me to take the matter in hand, and I think of no better mode of getting at the matter than to first communicate with you.

The Shebits Indians are a small tribe, numbering probably not more than 150 all told. Their home proper is on the Shebits mountain, about seventy-five miles south of St. George, but ever since the settlement of this portion of the Territory in 1861, a great portion of their time has been spent in and around the settlements, where they have been a great burden to the people.

Some years ago they sold to stockmen all the springs on the mountain, with their right to the grass and the country was stocked up with cattle. Matters moved along smoothly till it was discovered that the Indians were secretly killing cattle: then the stockmen entered such a strong protest that they finally promised to leave the mountain and live near St. George.

They moved in and in the hope of doing them good the citizens provided them with a good body of farming land on the Santa Clara and assisted them in putting in a crop. All was done for them that could be done under the circumstances and they seemed contented. What was our surprise when we learned, through some of their own people whom I had employed as detectives, that they were consistently killing and raiding our cattle, almost in sight of town. Some of the more guilty ones were arrested and imprisoned and the others made good promises for the future. This spring they came to me and said they could not farm any more because they had no teams or tools and that they were going back to the mountains, which they did. Word now comes to us that they are now again killing cattle and it looks as though, unless something is done with them soon, there will be trouble that will result in bloodshed. They are very ignorant Indians but like all other of their people are well skilled with most approved guns and know well how to use them and should some hotheaded cowboy take the law in his own hands and shoot one of them, which is likely if they continue their depredations, a serious conflict will be the result. I have talked with them and they say they are willing to work and would like to go on a reservation provided it could be established near St. George. Their own country on the mountains is entirely unfit, there being only a few small springs and no chance at all for farming.

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The Muddy valley, where a reservation was established a few years ago, is a low marshy place where ague is prevalent and they object to going there because they say they would soon all be dead, which is probably true.

There is a place about fifteen miles from St. George where there is a good body of land on the Santa Clara that would suit them. Plenty of grass for their ponies and some game. They say if they could be assisted a little they would settle down at this point and go to work. They are serious that I should be appointed to look after their welfare and say they will be governed by any arrangement I will make. Now I am ignorant of the proper method of getting this matter before the Indian Department and therefor take this liberty of addressing you upon the subject. The people are thoroughly aroused and the necessity for some arrangement is certainly urgent. The Indians must live, and to do it under existing circumstances they must steal. Any information you can give us upon the subject or assistance you can render us will be greatly appreciated.
Yours truly.

A. W. Ivans

DELEGATE CAINE'S LETTER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, U. S.,
Washington, D. C., July 10, 1890

To the Hon. Thomas J. Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C.
DEAR SIR: The undersigned your petitioners, citizens of the United States and residents of the county of Washington, respectfully represent that they are and have been long residents of Southern Utah.

That during such residence they have had ample opportunity of becoming acquainted with the tribe of Indians known as the Shebits who live in Southern Utah and Northern Arizona, but principally near the city of St. George.

That they know said Indians to be uncivilized, idle and little inclined to adopt the habit of industry which settlers have long endeavored to teach them.

That said Indians have been a heavy burden upon the settlers of this portion of the Territory of Utah. Since the first settlement of this country the settlers having been obliged to provide for the wants of said Indians in the absence of which provision the Indians have slaughtered the cattle and stolen the horses of the settlers.

That during the past year several of said Indians were arrested, tried and convicted for killing the cattle of the settlers. That since that time and during the present year they have continued their depredations and your petitioners are incensed and verily believe that they are now in the mountains killing the cattle of the ranchers.

Therefore, in consideration of the facts set forth and heretofore set forth in a communication dated June 30th and written by one of your petitioners, A. W. Ivans, to the Hon. John T. Caine, which communication is now in your possession, your petitioners earnestly pray that steps be immediately taken to place said Indians upon a suitable reservation in the vicinity of St. George and provision made for supplying them with the necessaries of life.

And your petitioners as in duty bound, will ever pray. Francis L Daggett, Probate Judge of Washington county, Territory of Utah; Robert C. Lund, Selectman; Martin Slack, Selectman; John A. Gardner, Selectman; Seth A. Pymm, County Clerk; George Brooks, Sheriff; Anthony W. Ivans, Mayor of St. George.

INSTRUCTIONS OF AGENT

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George W. Parker, Esq., U. S. Special Agent, Arkansas City, Kansas

SIR: As soon as you shall have completed your duties in the Indian Territory under existing instructions, you will proceed without unnecessary delay to Washington county in the southwest corner of Utah Territory, and investigate and report upon the condition and needs of the Shebits Indians, a small band said to number about 150 souls residing in the neighborhood of the town of St. George in said county of Washington. Repeated complaint has recently been made to this office by the white citizens residing in that locality of the bad conduct of these Indians. They are charged with being an idle, mischief-making people, a burden to the settlers and lately a menace to the peace, by reason of their frequent depredations upon the stock owned by the whites on the ranges in that locality. For your further information I enclose herewith a copy of a letter dated June 30, 1890, from A. W. Ivans, Esq. of St. George, Utah, reporting the proceedings of a meeting of the citizens of that town and vicinity recently held with a view to petitioning the Government to take some steps looking to the removal of these Indians from where they now are to a reservation to be provided for them somewhere in that immediate neighborhood. Also a copy of a letter dated July 30, 1890, from Hon. John T. Caine of the House of Representatives, testifying to the high character and standing of Mr. Ivans in the community where he resides, and vouching for the correctness of his statements, also a petition addressed to this office by Judge Francis L. Daggett, Messrs. Lund, Slack, and others, praying that said Indians may be placed upon a suitable reservation in the vicinity of St. George, and provision be made for supplying them with the necessities of life. Very little is known of these Indians in this department. Twenty years ago a small band of that name (spelled Sheav-wits) was living on the Sheav-wit plateau in Northern Arizona, and it is presumed that they are among the Indians for whom the reservation known as the Moapa River Reserve, formerly called the Muddy Valley Reserve, was established in 1873, but it would seem that they never went upon said reservation. The whites who are petitioning for relief say that these Indians belong to the "Shebits mountain" about 75 miles south of St. George, but that since 1861 they have spent a good deal of their time in and around white settlements in Southwestern Utah where they have been a great burden to the people. They state that the whites for their own protection provided the Indians with some good farming lands on the Santa Clara, and assisted them in putting in a crop and did all for them that their limited means would admit of; that for a time everything went smoothly and the Indians appeared to be contented, but the secret was soon discovered that they had been killing the stock of the whites for their subsistence. This led to the arrest and imprisonment of some of the guilty ones and others promised to refrain from such depredation in the future. These promises it seems were not kept and the result is that there is bad blood between the whites and the Indians which is likely to result in serious conflict at any time. The whites admit that the country where the Indians belong (the Shebits mountain) is entirely unsuitable for their wants, but state that a good place could be found for them on the Santa Clara about 15 miles from St. George, where the Indians would be willing to go.

I desire you to make a thorough investigation into this whole matter: ascertain where these Indians really belong, how long they have been in the locality where they now reside; how they came there, whether they belong upon any one of the existing reservations; how much land they are occupying and what particular use they are making of it, whether the whites appear to be coveting the lands occupied by them and are trying to get possession of the same; whether the charges against them of cattle stealing by them are true, etc. It is against the present policy to establish any more reservations for the Indians, and especially is it undesirable in the case of a small band like this, over whom the Government could have no satisfactory oversight unless an

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agency were also established with a regular list of employees, and the establishment of an agency for them is altogether impracticable. Some other plan therefor must be devised if anything is to be done for the benefit of these Indians and for the relief of the whites who complain against them.

Assuming from Mr. Caine's personal statements that the condition of affairs and strained relations between the whites and the Indians are such as to require some action on the part of the Government, the object of your investigation will be to report some practicable plan for the permanent settlement of these Indians in homes where they can become self-supporting. The citizens say they are willing to work and it is therefore not unreasonable to expect that if they were placed upon good land and given a little assistance they would soon be able to take care of themselves.

I am inclined to think that the Uintah Valley Reservation would be the best place to put them.

This could be done without negotiations with the Indians already there, but this office would like to know before taking such steps whether there is any unfriendliness between the Uintah valley Indians and this little band, or any other reason that might render it undesirable to locate the Shebits Indians on that reservation. Also whether they would be willing to go there. If they should go there it would not be far to send their children to Grand Junction in Colorado, where the Government has a school in which they could be placed.

It may be, however, that the best solution to the matter will be found in allotting them lands where they are or in that vicinity under the fourth section under the general allotment act (copy herewith). This will be a question for you to carefully consider, bearing in mind that it is far from the purpose of this office to take these Indians from where they now are if they are supporting themselves or can be made self-supporting with a little assistance, and place them upon a reservation to be fed at the public expense. If with a little aid in the way of implements, tools, seed, etc., they can make a good living where they are it is not proposed to make paupers of them by feeding them upon a reservation, and you must not put any notion of that kind into their heads. It would be better to settle them in homes where they are under the allotment act. Neither should they be removed simply to meet the wishes or convenience of the whites. Every community should bear the burden, if it be a burden, of its own Indian population, and not attempt to foist them upon other, perhaps more fortunate communities. You should examine the lands where they now reside or have been residing, and ask whether it is suitable to make allotments to them and whether there is enough unappropriated public land there to meet their reasonable wants. Also, see if they would be willing to send their children to some one of the Indian schools. While you are pursuing investigations, I desire you to make as complete a census of these Indians as is possible and forward the same with your reports.

Do not slight your investigation, but let it be thorough, and when completed carefully and intelligently, report it to this office to the end that this Department may be fully informed as to the condition, surroundings and needs of these Indians, and on all other points upon which information might be needed or desirable in the consideration of this case.

Very respectfully,

A. S. Belt, Acting Commissioner.