

*To Sophia Elizabeth Thoreau**May 22, 1843*Castleton, Staten Island, May 22nd

-43

Dear Sophia,

I have had a severe cold ever since I came here, and have been confined to the house for the last week with bronchitis, though I am now getting out, so I have not seen much in the botanical way. The cedar seems to be one of the most common trees here, and the fields are very fragrant with it. There are also the gum and tulip trees. The latter is not very common, but is very large and beautiful, bearing flowers as large as tulips and as handsome. It is not time for it yet. The woods are now full of a large honeysuckle in full bloom, which differs from ours in being red instead of white, so that at first I did not know its genus. The painted cup is very common in the meadows here. Peaches, and especially cherries, seem to grow by all the fences.

Things are very forward here compared with Concord^a. The apricots growing out of doors are already as large as plums. The apple, pear, peach, cherry, and plum trees, have shed their blossoms.

The whole Island is like a garden, and affords very fine scenery. In front of the house is a very extensive wood beyond which is the sea, whose roar I can hear all night long, when there is no wind, if easterly winds have prevailed on the Atlantic. There are always some vessels in sight—ten, twenty, or thirty miles off—and Sunday before last there were hundreds in long procession, stretching from New York to Sanday Hook, and far beyond, for Sunday is a lucky day.

I went to New York Saturday before last. A walk of half an hour, by half a dozen houses, along the Richmond road, ie. the road that leads to R—on which we live—brings me to the village of Stapleton,^a in Southfield^a, where is

the lower dock; but if I prefer I can walk along the shore three quarters of a mile further toward New York, to Quarantine,¹ a^a village of Castleton, to the upper dock, which the boat leaves five or six times every day, a quarter of an hour later than the former place. Further on is the village of New-Brighton—and further still Port Richmond, which villages another steam-boat^e visits.

In New York I saw Geo. Ward,² and also Giles Waldo³ and William Tappan, whom I can describe better when I have seen them more— They are young friends of Mr Emerson. Waldo came down to the Island to see me the next day. I also saw the Great Western, the Croton Water works, and the picture gallery of the National Academy of Design.⁴ But I have not had time to see or do much in N.Y. yet.

Tell Miss Ward I shall try to put my^a microscope⁵ to a good use, and if I find any new and pressible flower, will throw it into my common place book. Garlic, the original of the common onion, grows like grass here all over the fields, and during its season spoils the cream and butter for the market, as the cows like it very much. Tell Helen there are two schools just established in this neighborhood, with large prospects, or rather designs, one for boys, and another for girls. The latter by a Miss Errington⁶—and though it is very small as yet—I will keep my ears open for her in such directions— The encouragement is very slight.

I hope you will not be washed away by the Irish sea.⁷ Tell Mother I think my cold was not wholly owing to imprudence Perhaps I was being acclimated.

Tell Father⁸ that Mr Tappan whose son I know—and whose clerks young Tappan and Waldo are—has invented and established a new and very important business⁸—which Waldo thinks would allow them to burn 99 out of 100 of the stores in NY, which now only offset and cancel one another. It is a kind of intelligence office for the whole

country—with branches in the principal cities, giving information with regard to the credit and affairs of every man of business in the country. Of course it is not popular at the south and west. It is an extensive business and will employ a great many clerks.

Love to all—not forgetting aunt and aunts⁹—and Miss and Mrs Ward.

Y^{rs} Affectionate Brother
Henry D. Thoreau.

Correspondent: Sophia Elizabeth Thoreau (1819-1876), T's younger sister and the fourth child of John and Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau, studied at the Concord Academy and became a schoolteacher. A capable and active woman, she sang, played the piano, painted, helped T manage the family business after the death of their father, and ran the business herself after T's death. A devoted sister, Sophia carried food to T when he stayed at Walden Pond, kept a scrapbook that contained reviews of his work, nursed him on his deathbed, and edited his unpublished manuscripts after his death.

¹ In 1799 New York established a lazaretto at Tompkinsville on Staten Island, where passengers with contagious diseases were taken from their ships to be quarantined. The thirty-acre facility had a health officer, a doctor, and an aide.

² George Washington Ward (1802-1855), Prudence Ward's brother, lived in New York City.

³ In a letter to Emerson on May 14, Waldo wrote, "My interview with Thoreau has shown me how desperately ignorant I have been content to remain of books." On scholarly subjects, Waldo observed, "there could be but little sympathy between us,—at least that he had nothing to learn of me, while I must owe everything to him" (Harmon Smith, "Henry Thoreau and Emerson's 'Noble Youths,'" *CS* 17 [December 1984]: 5).

⁴ Built by the Great Western Railway Company in April 1838, the 236-foot-long *Great Western* was the first steamship in the transatlantic passenger trade, averaging fifteen and a half days to cross the Atlantic. The 41.5-mile-long Croton aqueduct was opened on July 4, 1842, when the first water from the new dam on the Croton River arrived at the distributing terminal at Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street. The National Academy of Design, founded on January 19, 1826, showed only original work by living artists; its 1843 annual exhibition opened on April 27 at its galleries on the upper floor of

the New York Society Library building at Broadway and Leonard Street. T could have seen a landscape by Asher Durand, portraits by Cephas Thompson and William Page, and "Return of Columbus" by Emanuel Leutze.

⁵ Prudence Ward gave T a microscope for his trip to Staten Island.

⁶ "Miss Errington" is either Harriet N. Errington (1815?-1896) or Georgiana Errington (1822?-1881), both of them daughters of Harriet Errington (1770?-1859). In 1843 the sisters were living in the Southfield area of Staten Island. The Errington school became a socially elite institution in Clifton, Staten Island.

⁷ Concord had recently seen a large influx of Irish workingmen, who helped build the Boston-Fitchburg railroad.

⁸ Lewis Tappan (1788-1873) established the Mercantile Agency in New York City, the first commercial credit-rating company in the United States, in 1841. His son, William Aspinwall Tappan, and Giles Waldo worked at the company's office. Lewis Tappan was a prominent abolitionist and a founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1840 he and his brother Arthur split with William Lloyd Garrison, another founding member, and formed the new American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

⁹ Louisa Dunbar (1785-1866) lived with the Thoreaus; Jane (1784-1864) and Maria Thoreau (1794-1881) were frequent visitors.

Copy-text: ALS (NN-BGC, Henry David Thoreau Collection, 1837-1917, Series III)

Published: *FL* 1894, 84-87; *FL* 1906, 71-73; *Cor* 1958, 105-106

Editor's Note

steam-boat] *PE*; steam- / boat *in MS*

Author's Alterations

Concord] concord

Stapleton,] *followed by cancelled* still

Southfield] *interlined above cancelled* Castleton

a] another

my] *interlined above cancelled* her

Father] father