

*To John Thoreau Jr.**November 11 and 14, 1837*

Musketaquid¹ two hundred and two Summers—two moons—eleven suns since the coming of the Pale Faces.²

Tahatawan—Sachimaupan—to his brother sachem—Hopeful—of Hopewell—hoping that he is well.³

Brother, it is many suns that I have not seen the print of thy moccasins by our council fire, the Great Spirit has blown more leaves from the trees and many clouds from the land of snows have visited our lodge—the earth has become hard like a frozen buffaloe skin, so that the trampling of many herds is like the Great Spirit's thunder—the grass on the great fields is like the old man of eighty winters—and the small song-sparrow prepares for his flight to the land whence the summer comes.

Brother—I write thee these things because I know that thou lovest the Great Spirit's creatures, and wast wont to sit at thy lodge door—when the maize was green—to hear the blue-bird's⁴ song. So shalt thou in the land of spirits, not only find good hunting grounds and sharp arrowheads—but much music of birds.

Brother. I have been thinking how the Pale-Faces have taken away our lands⁴—and was a woman. You are fortunate to have pitched your wigwam nearer to the great salt lake, where the Pale-Face^a can never plant corn.

Brother—I need not tell thee how we hunted on the lands of the Dundees—a great war-chief never forgets the bitter taunts of his enemies. Our young men called for strong-water—they painted their faces and dug up the hatchet. But their enemies the Dundees were women^a—they hastened to cover their hatchets with wampum. Our braves are not many—our enemies took a few strings from the heap their fathers left them, and our hatchets were buried.— But not Tahatawan's—his heart is of rock when the Dundees sing—his hatchet cuts deep into the Dundee braves.

Brother—there is dust on my moccasins— I have journeyed to the White^a lake in the country of the Ninares.⁵ The Long-knife^a has been there—like a woman I paddled his war-canoe. But the spirits of my fathers were angered.— the waters were ruffled and the Bad Spirit troubled the air.

The hearts of the *Lee*-vites are gladdened—the young Peacock has returned to his lodge by Nawshawtuck.⁶ He is the medicine of his tribe, but his heart is like the dry leaves when the whirlwind breathes. He has come to help choose new chiefs for the tribe in the great council house when two suns are past.—⁷ There is no seat for Tahatawan in the council-house. He lets the squaws talk—his voice is heard above the warwhoop of his tribe, piercing the hearts of his foes—his legs are stiff, he cannot sit.

Brother, art thou waiting for spring that the *geese* may fly low over thy wigwam? Thy arrows are sharp, thy bow is strong. Has Anawan killed all the eagles? The crows fear not the winter. Tahatawan's eyes are sharp—he can track a snake in the grass, he knows a friend from a foe—he welcomes a friend to his lodge though the ravens croak.

Brother hast thou studied much in the medicine books of the Pale-Faces? Dost thou understand the long talk of the great medicine whose words are like the music of the mockingbird^e. But our chiefs have not ears to hear him—they listen like squaws to council of old men—they understand not his words. But Brother, he never danced the war-dance, nor heard the warwhoop of his enemies. He was a squaw—he staid by the wigwam when the braves were out, and tended the tame buffaloes.

Fear not, the Dundees have faint hearts, and much wampum. When the grass is green on the great fields, and the small titmouse returns again we will hunt the buffaloe to gether.

Our old men say they will send the young chief of the Karlisles^a who lives in the green wigwam and is a great medicine, that his words may be heard in the long talk

which the wise men are going to hold at Shawmut⁹ by the salt-lake. He is a great talk—and will not forget the enemies of his tribe.

14th sun.

The fire has gone out in the council house. The words of our old men have been like the haunts of the Dundees. The Eagle-beak¹⁰ was moved to talk like a silly Pale-Face, and not as becomes a great warchief in a council of braves. The Young Peacock is a woman among braves—he heard not the words of the old men—like a squaw, he looked at his medicine-paper. The young chief of the green wig-wam has hung up his moccasins, he will not leave his tribe till after the buffaloe have come down onto the plains.

Brother this is a long talk—but there is much meaning to my words—they are not like the thunder of canes when the lightning smites them.

Brother I have just heard *thy talk* and am well pleased—thou are getting to be a great medicine.

The Great Spirit confound the
enemies of thy tribe.

Tahatawan
his mark



Correspondent: T's older brother John Thoreau (1814-1842) was the second child of John and Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau. Henry and John enjoyed a close relationship: from 1839 to 1841 they ran the Concord Academy together, and between the school's summer and fall sessions in 1839 they took a two-week boat trip on the Concord and Merrimack rivers, a trip that Henry memorialized in his first book. John died from lockjaw on January 11, 1842.

¹ The Indian name for Concord and for the Concord River.

² T dates the first part of this letter from the coming of the English to Concord in September 1635, i.e., November 11, 1837.

³ Tahattawan was an Indian sachem living in what is now Concord before the arrival of the English. "Sachimaupan" means "he that was prince here" (Roger Williams, "A Key into the Language of America," in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 1st ser., vol. 3 [1794; repr. 1810], p. 237). Hopewell was the district in Taunton where John was teaching.

⁴ T refers to the land that English settlers bought from the local Indian tribes to establish Concord.

⁵ White Pond in Nine-Acre Corner.

⁶ Nawshawtuck Hill was also known as Lee's Hill; many generations of the Lee family lived there.

⁷ Massachusetts elected its representatives to the state legislature (the "great council house") on November 16.

⁸ Probably Albert H. Nelson, born in Carlisle, Massachusetts. Nelson, a Whig, lost to Stedman Buttrick, the Democrat incumbent, who polled 170 votes to 134 for Nelson.

⁹ The Indian name for Boston.

¹⁰ Probably Samuel Hoar.

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Editor's Notes

This letter is addressed "Sachem Hopeful. / of Hopewell."

blue-bird's] *PE*; blue- / bird's *in MS*

mockingbird] *PE*; mocking- / bird *in MS*

Author's Alterations

Pale-Face] pale-face

women] woman

White] white

Long-knife] long-knife

To Orestes Augustus Brownson

December 30, 1837

Concord Dec 30th 1837

Dear Sir

I have never ceased to look back with interest, not to say satisfaction, upon the short six weeks which I passed with you. They were an era in my life—the morning of a new *Lebenstag*.¹ They are to me as a dream that is dreamt, but which returns from time to time in all its original freshness. Such a one as I would dream a second and a third time, and then tell before breakfast.

I passed a few hours in the city, about a month ago,