

Selections from  
**THE “INDIAN NOTEBOOKS” (1847-1861)**  
**OF**  
**HENRY D. THOREAU**

Transcribed, with an Introduction and additional material,  
by Richard F. Fleck



Arrowhead drawing by Thoreau  
[Journal: 28 March 1859]

On-line edition prepared under the auspices of  
**The Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods**  
January 2007 [revised, June 2007]

© The Walden Woods Project 2007

## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Acknowledgements	14
 THOREAU'S FRAGMENTARY ESSAY ON PRIMAL CULTURE	 15
 SELECTIONS FORM THE INDIAN NOTEBOOKS:	
Traveling	21
Physique	22
Music	24
Games	27
Dwellings	28
Feasting	30
Food	34
Charity	39
Funerals	40
Tradition and History	44
Morale	82
Marriage Customs	84
Manufacturers	87
Education	89
Dress	91
Painting	94
Money	95
Naming	96
Government	98
Treatment of Captives	100
Mariners	102
Woodcraft	103
Hunting	104
Fishing	105
Superstitions and Religions	106
Medicine	115
War	117

Language	119
Indian Relics	129
Arts Derived from the Indians	133
Works Cited	135
Bibliography	138

## Introduction to the On-line Edition

By Richard F. Fleck

Part of Henry David Thoreau's purpose in creating his 2,800 handwritten pages of "Indian Notebooks" was to write a book or at least long essays on North American Indian cultures which would assist in correcting a myopic view of most nineteenth-century Euro-Americans by giving us, for the first time a North American's appreciation of North America. This continent had and still has a rich and deep indigenous story behind it. Though he did not live to write his book, we do have his voluminous notes and an important fragmentary essay probably written in late 1852 or very early 1853 within the notebooks themselves (Indian Notebooks<sup>1</sup> VI:111-116) at a time when Thoreau had not yet met his friends, the Penobscot Indians Joe Aitteon and Joe Polis who would aide immeasurably in his Indian education deep in the woods of Maine.

Thoreau's fragmentary essay certainly would have been enriched had he written it several years later. The nature of this early essay gives us hints about the potential direction of his intended longer work. We can see that Thoreau understood well the differences between eastern and western medicine and that the Indian's medicine man looked beyond the mere physical condition by working holistically on the patient's spirit and imagination. He goes on to note that physical aspects of existence in early North America were harsh and yet the routes they took across the wilderness have become our very routes and their place names have become ours (Chekakou-Chicago). But in early America one best survived

---

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter abbreviated as IN.

by studying closely the habits of animal brethren, a seeming difference between the European and Native American.

Thoreau, however, looked for basic human commonalities as well among all peoples and surely the love of and need for drumbeat is one of them. He also observes the division of labor among men and women, and the cruelty and mistreatment of fellow human beings are a few of the other basic commonalities. Thoreau wonders “what kind of facts—what kind of events are those which transpired in America before it was known to the inhabitants of the old world?” One clue might very well be found in tribal mythologies and it is clear why he collected so many myths (under the topics of “Tradition and History” and “Superstitions & Religion”). I feel sure that myths would have played an important role in his intended book since he himself became a mythmaker in his published writings. One example of this is found in *The Maine Woods*:

“All winter the logger goes on piling up the trees which he has trimmed and hauled in some dry ravine at the head of a stream, and then in the spring he stands on the bank and whistles for Rain and Thaw, ready to wring the perspiration out of his shirt to swell the tide, till suddenly, with a whoop and halloo from him, shutting his eyes, as if to bid farewell to the existing state of things, a fair portion of his winter’s work goes scrambling down the country, followed by his faithful dogs, Thaw and Rain and Freshet and Wind, the whole pack in full cry, toward the Orono Mills” (*The Maine Woods*, 55). The “antiad” or battle of the ants in *Walden* serves as another example from many found throughout his published works (see my article “Thoreau as Mythmaker and Fabulist” listed in References).

He read extensively all of the myths in Henry Roe Schoolcraft's *History of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, and reflected that "ancient history is mythology" and that the Indian saw "the great spirit in everything" (IN V: 52). Thoreau believed that Americans have for too long neglected a rich heritage of Indian mythologies. Some of these myths did get into *Walden* (e.g. how Walden Pond was formed) and *The Maine Woods* (e.g. the mythic origins of the moose), but hundreds of them remain unpublished in the notebooks.

The selected myths which follow from the "Indian Notebooks" hopefully will aid in confirming my suspicion that had he lived, his Indian book would have surely dealt with his strong interest as a relativist asserting that mythological unities exist among varied tribal groups even beyond the shores of this continent. The fragmentary essay that appears at the very beginning of this online edition certainly points toward the relativist direction. Thoreau believed that the entire human race was much closer to the Earth's truth before sophisticated civilization shielded us from its light. Thoreau would have given some copper tints to our over-civilized civilization through the pages of his intended work.

But there are many other categories of topics collected in his Indian Notebooks. Thoreau began taking notes on tribal cultures in 1847 (while still at Walden Pond) and continued to do so through his trip to Minnesota during the spring of 1861. As Walter Harding notes, the extracts at first were mere quotations taken from various sources, but once he met Indian people and once he dug into *The Jesuit Relations*, his Indian Notebooks took on the form of a truly inspiring project (Harding, 427). Somehow Thoreau wished to learn as much as possible about the seemingly vanishing cultures of our continent. This arrow-headed culture had to be deciphered

before its destruction in order that our own so called civilization would not bury itself in its own increasingly materialistic concerns. Surely the Indian's very language, life style and thought processes were much closer to wild nature than those of the nineteenth-century American who was busy conquering the wilderness.

During the 1840's and 50's Thoreau began to read extensively about American Indian cultures in such books as *The Jesuit Relations*, John Smith's *General Historie of Virginia*, Thomas Hutchinson's *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay* and many others. He describes these old books in his *Journal*: "I think myself in a wilder country, and a little nearer to primitive times, when I read in old books which spell the word savages with an l (salvages), like John Smith's 'General Historie of Virginia, etc.,' reminding me of the derivation of the word from sylva. There is some of the wild wood in its bristling branches still left in their language. The savages they described are really salvages, men of the woods" (IN IV:494). He studied Indian language dictionaries that they "reveal another and wholly new life to us. Look at the word 'wigwam,' and see how close it brings you to the ground...It reveals to me a life within a life, or rather a life without a life, as it were threading the woods between our towns still, and yet we can never tread in its trail. The Indian's earthly life was far off from us as heaven is" (IN X:295).

Thoreau's experience was not limited to books. He listened to the spoken word deep in the Maine woods and out on the Minnesota prairies. He not only loved listening to their primal languages, he also delighted in hearing their histories and traditions by the light of flickering campfires. He enjoyed learning about their way of life be it funeral customs, woodcraft or foods. His eleven volumes of notes housed at the Pierpont

Morgan Library along with his *Minnesota Journey* (edited by Walter Harding) contain the largest body of knowledge on American Indian cultures in the nineteenth century (see my essay "Thoreau as Amerindianist" listed in References).

Whether or not Thoreau was being ironic in the following statement is a moot point: "The fact is, the history of the white man is a history of improvement, that of the red man a history of fixed habits of stagnation" (*Journal*, X:252). But he would have been pleased, I believe, to have read Vine Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969) that makes just this point. Had it not been for the "stagnation," any "Indianness" that remains with modern tribes would have been forever lost. We have long ago lost our Druidic notions about the natural world because of our "history of improvement:" however, what we have lost is irreparable. Our mystical and woodsy side has been tucked away in societal niceties that shield us from our primal natures.

Thoreau made this extremely relevant distinction between the white and red man: "The constitution of the Indian mind appears to be very opposite to that of the white man. He is acquainted with a different side of nature. He measures his life by winters, not summers. His year is not measured by the sun, but consists of a certain number of moons, and his moons are measured not by days, but by nights. He has taken hold of the dark side of nature; the white man, the bright side" (*Journal*, IV:400). Thoreau, a lover of winter walks, night and moonlight, and the "dark side of nature" is *spiritually* closer to an Algonquin than a European. Certainly his deep immersion into the myth and ethos of the American Indian explains in large part his life style, his thoughts and his being. Thoreau, who spent two years living at Walden, living in the woods observing



nature and who went on numerous excursions into the wilderness talking with tribal peoples, was indeed a “white” Indian. He surely helps explain Carl Jung’s contention that at the core of the American psyche is the Indian.

Thoreau’s personal contact with Indian tribesmen of the Northeastern woodlands and Minnesota must have confirmed his belief that “they [Indians] seem like a race who have exhausted the secrets of nature, tanned with age, while this young and still fair Saxon slip, on whom the sun has not yet long shone, is but commencing its career” (*Journal*, I:444). If we are to commence our career in North America with all of its mythological mystique, it follows that we must learn much from its various native cultures:

“If wild me, so much more like ourselves than they are unlike, have inhabited these shores before us, we wish to know particularly what manner of men they were, how they lived here, their relation to nature, their arts and their customs, their fancies and superstitions. They paddled over these waters, they wandered in these woods, and they had their fancies and beliefs connected with the sea and the forest, which concern us quite as much as the fables of Oriental nations do. It frequently happens that the historian, though he professes more humanity than the trapper, mountain man, or gold digger, who shoots one as a wild beast, really exhibits and practices a similar inhumanity to him, wielding a pen instead of a rifle” (*Journal*, XI:437-438).

Thoreau’s Indian Notebooks put into practice Thoreau’s own suggestions above. That is, “we wish to know particularly what manner of men they were.” His notes, written in English, French, Italian, Latin and occasionally Hebrew, not only concern manners and customs of North

American Indians, but also of Greenland and Canadian Inuits, of Polynesians, of South American Indians, of Arabian Bedouins and of African tribesman indicating the scope of his fascination with primal cultures of the land. The majority of the notebook material focuses on North American tribes and includes diagrams and intricate sketches from such writers as Cotton Mather, Thomas Hutchinson, John Josselyn, Samuel de Champlain, Jacques Cartier, Giovanni Da Verrazano, Henry Roe Schoolcraft, Ephraim Squier, Charles Darwin, John Heckewelder, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Eubank and John Tanner. According to Albert Keiser, Thoreau made use of over 200 books for his tribal note-taking (Keiser, 211). While a portion of his notes record practical affairs of aborigines such as the creating of weapons, pottery, living quarters and miscellaneous implements, they also collect specific creation myths, etiological tales (Indian stories inspired by natural phenomena), animal fables, superstitions and legends about the coming of white man.

In addition to commonplace notes telling us the kinds of things that gained his attention, Thoreau splices in bits of hitherto unpublished commentary. The comments form, as a body, his reaction to information culled during the note-taking process. After reading David Crantz' *History of Greenland*, for instance, Thoreau observed, "I am struck by the close resemblance in manners & customs of the Greenlanders and our Ind. If they are proved to be a distinct race—it will show that similarity of manners & customs is no evidence of a common origin" (IN X:317). The notebooks also contain three hitherto lost journal entries on Indian relics along with some sketches. Numerous passages found in his *Journal*, *Walden*, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, *The Maine Woods* and *Cape Cod* have their source in the notebooks. Thoreau also made notations

or reminders to himself to check other sources, sometimes poetic (e.g. Philip Freneau's Indian poems) for useful information. The notebooks, then, are more than just a collection of extracts but are indeed a valuable set of writer's notes as well.

Found at the end of Volume One of the Indian Notebooks is the following outline labeled as "my own" for his never-completed book on the Indians of North America:

Travelling [*sic*]  
Physique  
Music  
Games  
Dwellings  
Feasting  
Food  
Charity  
Funeral customs  
Tradition & history  
Morale  
Marriage customs  
Manufacturers  
Education  
Dress  
Painting  
Money  
Naming  
Government

Treatment of captives  
Mariners  
Woodcraft  
Hunting  
Food<sup>2</sup>  
Fishing  
Superstitions & Religions  
Medicine  
War  
Language  
Ind. Relics  
Arts derived from the Indians

By Volume Five Thoreau started to group his notes under the actual topics of his own outline

---

This online selection from the Indian Notebooks contains not only those portions made in my book *The Indians of Thoreau* (Albuquerque: Hummingbird Press, 1974) but also from those in the Appendix of *Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Indians* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1985) and additional material from my article found in "Further Selections from the Indian Notebooks" found the *Thoreau Journal Quarterly* (January, 1977), 2-23. I believe that the selections are a representative sampling from all

---

<sup>2</sup> Thoreau mistakenly listed this twice.

eleven volumes of the Pierpont Morgan collection on the subject categories of the above outline. The topics of “Tradition & history,” and “Superstitions & Religions” and “Language” seemed to have interested him the most, and therefore samplings from these three areas are representatively larger. Thoreau’s original notebook commentary and the “lost” Journal entries are furnished in their original context. Notebook passages later used in his published works are compared with the published versions. Some of his more unusual sketches have been reproduced. Since Thoreau does not always include the specific date and publisher of the book he used, I simply provide the same bibliographic information that appears in the manuscript. For some extracts he simply notes only the author of the book. The text includes brief descriptions of the books Thoreau actually used. I trust that this elemental fabric of the notebooks will furnish the reader with some idea of the entire eleven volumes and the vast scope of Henry David Thoreau’s unfinished Indian project.

John Aldrich Christie remarked in *Thoreau as World Traveler* that to see the “Indian Notebooks” as a lost cause because he never completed his book on the Indians is to miss the richer harvest that these materials offered to Thoreau as a scholar and poet” (231). Robert F. Sayre writes “His Indian reading was a wilder raw material that seldom went straight into his finished work. It was like a pile of fine logs drying behind a carpenter’s shop—uncut, maybe for use someday, and meanwhile a joy to possess and go to for certain jobs” (Sayre, 108). But, had he lived to write his poetic and scholarly Indian book, our deplorable treatment of the red man during the nineteenth century may have been modified. These notebooks are for us of the twenty-first century a truly significant record of

an otherwise almost exterminated way of life. Thoreau's deep immersion into this earlier way of life explains in large part his very own life style, thought and being. Perhaps someday, contemporary Native American writers and scholars such as N. Scott Momaday or Paula Gunn Allen will take note of this important side of Henry David Thoreau.

Richard F. Fleck

Denver, Colorado, Late Summer, 2006

## Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, for allowing us to publish this on-line version of selections from Thoreau's Indian notebooks (MA 596-606).

The material in *Selections from the "Indian Notebooks" (1847-1861) of Henry D. Thoreau* has been previously published in different form in:

- *The Indians of Thoreau*. Albuquerque: Hummingbird Press, 1974.
- *Henry Thoreau and John Muir among the Indians*. Hamden: Archon Books, 1985.
- "Further Selections from Thoreau's Indian Notebooks"  
*Thoreau Journal Quarterly* (January, 1977)

Special thanks to Koh Kasegawa for his meticulous reading of *The Indians of Thoreau* and his identification of several transcription errors.

THOREAU'S FRAGMENTARY ESSAY  
ON PRIMAL CULTURE

The Medicine man is indispensable to work upon the imagination of the Indian by his jugglery—and of like value for the most part as the physician to the civilized man.

Men lived and died in America, though they were copper colored, before the white man came. Charlevoix states that the Olchagnas, commonly called Puana—who gave their name to the Baye de Puans (Green Bay) already much reduced lost 600 of their best men in a single squawl.

Whence, it is that all nations have something like a drum. Charlevoix speaks of the *tambour* of the Indians. There would appear to be a kind of necessity in human nature to produce this instrument. In London & Paris you hear the sound of the unmusical drum which has come down from antiquity.

The trader's price for a handkerchief or string of beads in California is all the gold the Indian has got be it more or less—a thousand dollars is not too much nor one dollar too little. Accordingly the Indian learns to put his gold into separate little sacks, and say that one contains his all.—So was it with the fur traders. [IN VI:111]

How tan [a French explorer] returning from his somewhat fabulous expedition up the River *Longue* in 1688 says "We arrived there for the 24th at *Chekakou* (Chicago), the place where the reembarkment was to be made." Thus the white man has but followed in the steps of the Indian. Where the Ind. made his portages the white man makes his—or makes the stream more navigable. The New Englander goes to Wisconsin & Iowa by



routes which the Indians discovered & used ages ago and partly perchance the buffaloes used before the Indians. At the points of embarkation or debarkation in the route where was once an Indian is now in many instances no doubt a white man's city – with its wharves.<sup>3</sup>

Labor among the Indians was to a certain extent merely mechanically divided between men & women. The former making their canoes and nets[,] traps &c – whatever [their?] hunting & fishing required – The women – made the utensils of the house &c.

Each savage feels the necessity of being governed by reason in the absence of law – Hence gives of his game to his 'old relations' &c.

The Indian like the muskrat fee[d] on fresh water clams apparently – Both had a strong hold on life naturally – but are alike exterminated at last by the white man's improvements. He was hardy & supple & of a cold temperament like the muskrat whose feast he shared and whose skins he often used. [IN VI:112]

What a vast difference between a savage & a civilized people. At first it appears but a slight difference in degree – and the savage excelling in many physical qualities – we underrate the comparative general superiority of the civilized man. Compare the American family (so called by Morton), with (his) Toltecan – Consider what kind of relics the former have left – at most rude earthen mounds – pottery, & stone implements; but of the latter Morton says, "From the Rio Gila in California, to the southern extremity of Peru, their architectural remains are every where encountered to surprise the traveller and confound the antiquary: among these are pyramids, temples, grotoes, bas-reliefs, and arabesques; while

---

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly enough, this is a major point made by the modern historian Francis Jennings in his book *The Invasion of America*. – R.F.

their roads, aquaducts and fortifications, and the sites of their mining operations, sufficiently attest their attainments in the practical arts of life.”

How different the evidence afforded by an earthen mound containing rude fragments of pottery & stone spearheads—and that afforded the remains of a public or military road.

Morton (in his *Crania*) quotes Sir Win Jones [indirectly] as saying “The Greeks called all the southern nations of the world by the common appellation of Ethiopians. Thus using Ethiop and Indian as convertible terms.” Being the origin of the word “Indian”? [IN VI:113]

Perhaps what the Orientals were to the Greeks—barbarians—the Indians are to some extent to us.

We have a voluminous history of Europe for the last 10,000 years—Suppose we had as complete a history of Mexico & Peru for the same period—a history of the American Continent,—the reverse of the medal. It is hard to believe they, a civilised people, inhabited these countries unknown to the old world! What kind of facts—what kind of events are those which transpired in America before it was known to the inhabitants of the old world?

“The archaeological antiquaries, without reference to any theory derived from mythology or from languages, have found that their subjects of study, the relics of antiquity, naturally fall into three divisions :—that of an age prior to the use of metals in arms or utensils, when bone & stone were the materials used; and in that age burning appears to have been the way of disposing of the dead, less perhaps from any observance connected with religion, than from the want of metal tools to dig the soil with so as to inter the dead; that is a mixture of metals to give hardness to copper or other soft metals; and in which age the use of stone for hammers, arrow—

points, or spearheads, [IN VI:114] was still mixed with the use of metals ; and lastly an age when iron was applied to these purposes, although bronze, and even stone & bone, were still in use, from the want no doubt, of a sufficient supply of iron, and from the great consumpt of it in missile weapons. Although dates cannot be assigned to these three ages, and they run into each other, yet the mass of relics of ancient times so clearly fall into these three divisions, that the Museum of Northern Antiquities at Copenhagen is divided & arranged upon this principle, and with the fullest approbation of the learned antiquaries of the North. The division coincides with & confirms the results of the mythological and philological researches. These epochs, however, are beyond the pale of chronology.” Laing’s Appendix to Jnorrs<sup>4</sup>?

In Kin Hakon, the Broad-shouldered’s fleet in the 12th century – “All the small ships lay farther off, and they were all nearly loaded with weapons & stones.” Jnorrs.

King Sigfried the Crusader of Norway earlier the same century “imposed a duty on all the districts in the neighborhood of the town [of Konghelle], as well as on the town’s people, – that every person of nine years of age and upwards should bring to the castle five missile stones for weapons, or as many large stakes, sharp at one end and 5 ells long.” Ibid [IN VI:115]

The Indians having no Sunday – feasts, games dance &c, are the more important to them!

---

<sup>4</sup> *Journal of Residence in Norway.*

The recent '52 persecution in Persia of the Sect of the Babis equals in the atrocity of the tortures employed—the lingering deaths at which all people assist—the practices of our Indians. [IN VI:116]

## SELECTIONS FROM THE INDIAN NOTEBOOKS

---

NOTE: material from the Indian Notebooks is printed in black below;  
commentary and additional material by Richard Fleck is printed in gray

## TRAVELLING

R. P. François-X de Charlevoix's *Histoire et description generale de la Nouvelle France* not only describes and comments upon the adventures of such explorers as Cartier, Maloin, Laudonnière but also gives a thorough account of his own voyage to Canada in the mid-eighteenth century. Charlevoix's work, first published in Paris in 1744, is a detailed account of early French Canadian and Canadian Indian cultures in the Saint Lawrence River Valley. One of the things that caught Thoreau's attention was the many intricate descriptions of aboriginal snowshoes, some of which he extracted:

They "are about 3 feet long, and approx 15 to 16 inches in their extreme width. They are of an oval shape, except that the hind part terminates in a point; there are small bits of wood placed around 5 or 6 inches from either end, which serve to strengthen them, and that on the fore part is a . . . string of a bow under an opening in which the foot is inserted, and made fast with thongs."

"You must turn your knees inwards, keeping your legs at a good distance from each of them.<sup>5</sup>

"Their sledges" (for the baggage and wounded) "are two small and very thin boards half a foot broad each, and six or 7 [feet] long. The fore part is somewhat raised, and the sides bordered with small boards to which the thongs for binding whatever is laid upon the carriage are fastened." (IN II:4)

---

<sup>5</sup> Shoes.

Marc Lescarbot's *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*, first published in Paris in 1612, gave Thoreau much background on the voyages of such French explorers as Jacques Cartier and Samuel de Champlain in the wilderness of Canada. As Lescarbot says of New France, "Il n'y a point les violins, les masquarades, les dances, les palais, les villes et les beaux batimens de France." But there are obviously uncultured "savages" and dark wilderness in contrast. Thoreau was particularly interested in Lescarbot's depiction of aboriginal culture. He extracted the following note from this work on primitive bark canoes: "Use bark canoes sewn with roots & stopped with gomme de sapins—ribbed with cedar." (IN III:59)

### PHYSIQUE

Thoreau wrote in his "Indian Notebooks": "June 21 '58 Examined at Cambridge today the unbound added *Relations*." (IN X:140) If he had noted each time that he went to Harvard to read these works, his notebooks would have been jammed with such entries. The multi-volumed *Jesuit Relations* (1632-1673) in French by various Jesuit fathers including Sebastien Rasles, and Fathers LeJeune and Le Mercier gave Thoreau a tremendous body of information on French exploration of Canada beyond the Saint Lawrence River and of French-Indian relations as well as tribal customs and beliefs before white influence became dominant. Certainly the directness and simplicity of the Jesuit Fathers would have attracted Thoreau. He must have been particularly struck by Sebastien Rasles' physical description of the typical northern Indian: "To give you an idea of an Indian, imagine to yourself a large man, powerful, active, of a swarthy

complexion, without beard, with black hair, and his teeth whiter than ivory." (IN II:17)

John Richardson's *Arctic Searching Expedition* (1852), with its extensive charts of Canada and eye-catching engravings of arctic landscapes, gave Thoreau invaluable information on Eskimos and Eskimo culture. Richardson's appreciation of Eskimo or Inuit culture gained his interest, and Thoreau learned of the Eskimo's respect for the territorial rights of other tribes. The physical appearance of northern tribesmen was well-delineated:

"Their<sup>6</sup> complexions approach more nearly white than those of the neighboring nations, and do not permit the designation of 'red', though from exposure to weather they become dark after manhood." (IN V:6)

"The habitual gait of the Red man is not a graceful one. The toes are turned in; the step, though elastic, has an appearance of insecurity, and is by no means majestic, nor even pleasing, to one unaccustomed to see the center of gravity thrown so much forward." (IN V:11)

Samuel George Morton's *Crania Americana* (Philadelphia, 1839) proved fascinating for Henry Thoreau. Morton, the collector of one of the largest nineteenth-century skull collections in America, based this ethnographic study of primitive tribes in America on anatomy, artifacts,

---

<sup>6</sup> The Eskimos.



and history; and he theorized on the various distinct primitive races of our continent. Thoreau jotted down Morton's classifications:

Morton makes 2 races the "American race", and the "Polar tribes or Mongol Americans"; and he describes the former into two families[,] the American and the Toltecan. Thinks the Esquimaux came from Asia—but the Americans an original race. He divides the American family into 4 branches. "1st" the Appalachian Branch may include all the nations of North America excepting the Mexicans, together with the tribes north of the river of Amazons and east of the Andes. The head is rounded, the nose large, salient and aquiline; the eyes dark brown, and with little or no obliquity of portion; the mouth is large & straight, the teeth nearly vertical, and the whole face triangular. The neck is long, the chest broad but rarely deep, the body and limbs muscular, and seldom disposed to obesity. In character these nations are warlike, cruel and unforgiving. They turn with aversion from the restraints of civilized life, and have made but trifling progress in mental culture or the useful arts." 2nd the Amazilian Branch—3d the Patagonian—4th the Fuegian. (IN V:36-37)

## MUSIC

*Jesuit Relations* (1634):

"As for superstitious songs (chants) they use them in a thousand actions, the sorcerer and this old man, of whom I have spoken gave me the reason of it; two savages said they, being formerly very much

troubled (desolé) seeing themselves within two fingers of death for want of food were advised to sing and they would be succored; which accordingly happened for having sung they found something to eat." (IN V:165).

"They join their drums to their songs (chants). I asked the origin of this drum, the old man told me that perhaps some one had had a dream that it was good to use them and thence sprung the use of them. I should think rather that they had derived this superstition from neighboring nations, for I am told (I know not if it is true) that they imitate very much the Canadians who inhabit towards Gaspé, a people yet more superstitious than these." (IN VI:1)

John Heckewelder's *An Account of the History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations* is an excellent source for the historical traditions, government, education, language and social customs of the Indians of Pennsylvania and neighboring states. Heckewelder gives a number of accounts of the Indians' feelings toward their miserable treatment by whites such as the following: "We were enraged when we saw the white people put our friends and relatives, whom they had taken prisoners, on board of their ships, and carry them off to sea, whether to drown or sell them as slaves, in the country from which they came, we knew not, but certain it is that none of them have ever returned or even been heard of." When the Indians were undisturbed by the whites, their musical natures surfaced:

Dances—"I would prefer being present at them [when intended merely for diversion] for a full hour, than a few minutes only as such dances as I have witnessed in our country taverns among the white people. Their songs are by no means not harmonious. They sing a chorus; first the man & then the woman. At times the women join in the general song, or repeat the strain which the men have just finished. It seems like 2 parties singing in questions & answers, and is upon the whole very agreeable & enlivening. After thus singing for about a quarter of an hour, they conclude each song with a loud yell, which I must confess is not in concord with the rest of the music; it is not unlike the cat-bird which closes its pretty song with mewling like a cat—the singing always begins by one person only, but others soon fall in successively until the general chorus begins, the drum beating all the while to mark the time. The voices of the women are clear & full, and their intonations generally correct." (IN VIII: 248)

In a distinctly Thoreauvian preface to his *League of the Ho-de'-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois* (Rochester, 1851), Lewis Morgan affirms, "To encourage a kinder feeling towards the Indian, founded upon a truer knowledge of his civil and domestic institutions, and of his capabilities for future elevation, is the motive in which this work originated." Morgan discusses the structure of the League of Iroquois, their relations with Europeans, their family and social customs, religious beliefs and language. It was only natural for Thoreau to extract notes on his favorite instrument, the flute:

The Indian flute. "This instrument is unlike any known among us, but it clearly resembles the clarionet. Its name signifies 'a blow pipe.' It is usually made of red cedar, is about 18 inches in length, and about an inch in diameter. The finger holes, 6 in number, are equidistant. Between them & the mouth piece, which is at the end, is the whistle, contrived much upon the same principle as the common whistle. It makes 6 consecutive notes, from the lowest on a rising scale. The 1st note is wanting, but the 3 or 4 next above are regularly made. This is the whole compass of the instrument. It is claimed as an Indian invention." (IN VII: 407)

## GAMES

Charlevoix's *Description de la Nouvelle France*: The game of straws—the game of the cross rackets in which they catch a ball—["] they also throw the ball by hand keeping it up without falling. This is another game." (IN II: 9)

Thoreau borrowed many times from the library of the Massachusetts Historical Society various volumes of the *Massachusetts Historical Collections* which reprinted earlier historical accounts by Massachusetts Bay Colony settlers such as Daniel Gookin's *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England* (1674). These collections proved a rich source for Massachusetts Indian culture, and, as we shall see, Thoreau's extracts found their way into many of his published writings. Here is his note on Indian foot races:

"I have known many of them run between four score and an hundred miles in a summer's clay, and back within two days. They

do also practice running of races and commonly in the summer they delight to go with out shoes, although they have them hanging at their backs." (IN I: 55)

## DWELLINGS

Thoreau made numerous sketches of Indian dwellings. From Gookin's *Indians in New England* he copied the following description into his "Indian Notebook" and later used it in writing *Walden*.

### "Indian Notebook"

"Their houses, or wigwams, are built with small poles fixed in the ground, bent and fastened together with barks of trees oval . . . on the top. The best sort of their houses are covered very neatly, tight, and warm, with barks of trees, slipped from their bodies at such seasons when the sap is up; and made into great flakes with pressures of weighty timber, when they are green; and so becoming dry, they will retain a form suitable for the use they prepare them for. The meaner sort of wigwams are covered with mats, they make of a kind of bulrush, which are also indifferent tight and warm, but not so good as the former. These houses they make of several sizes, according to their activity & ability; some twenty, some forty feet long and thirty feet<sup>7</sup> broad. Some I have seen of sixty or a hundred feet long and thirty feet broad. In the smaller sort they make a fire in the center of the house; and have a lower hole on the top of the

---

<sup>7</sup> Crossed out.

house, to let out the smoke. They keep the door shut, by a mat falling thereon, as people go in and out. This they do to fire-vent air coming in, which will cause much smoke in every(?)<sup>8</sup> windy weather. If the smoke beat down at the lower hole, they hang a little mat in the way of a screen, on the top of the house, which they can with a . . . turn to the windward side, which prevents the smoke. In the greater houses they make two, three, or four fires at a distance one from another, for the better accommodation of the people belonging to it. I have often lodged in their wigwams, and have found them as warm as the best English houses." (IN II:39-40)

### *Walden*

A comfortable house for a rude and hardy race, that lived mostly out of doors, was once made here almost entirely of such materials as Nature furnished ready to their hands. Gookin, who was superintendent of the Indians subject to the Massachusetts Colony, writing in 1674, says, "The best of their houses are covered very neatly, tight and warm, with barks of trees, slipped from their bodies at those seasons when the sap is up, and made into great flakes, with pressure of weighty timber, when they are green . . . . The meaner sort are covered with mats which they make of a kind of bulrush, and are also indifferently tight and warm, but not so good as the former . . . . Some I have seen, sixty or a hundred feet long and thirty feet broad . . . . I have often lodged in their wigwams, and found them as warm as the best English houses." (*Walden* 29)

---

<sup>8</sup> Thoreau's question mark.

Richardson's *Arctic Searching Expedition*:

"A circle is first traced on the smooth surface of the snow, and the slabs for raising the walls are cut from within, so as to clear a space down to the ice, which is to form the floor of the dwelling . . . . The slabs requisite to complete the dome, after the interior of the circle is exhausted, are cut from some neighboring spot. Each slab is neatly fitted to its place by running a . . . knife along the joint, when it instantly presses to the wall, the cold atmosphere forming a most excellent cement. Crevices are plugged up, and seams accurately closed by throwing a few shovel-fuls of loose snow over the fabric. Two men generally work together in raising a house, and the one who is stationed within cuts a low door, and creeps out when his task is over." (IN V:6)

From the *Jesuit Relations* of 1634 Thoreau paraphrases: "In a chief's cabin were 3 fires 5 or 6 feet in the middle of the ground covered with fir (sapin) branches." (IN VI:3-4)

## FEASTING

Of *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner* (New York, 1830), Paul Radin says that it easily takes first place among records of captivity. Tanner spent thirty years among the Ottawa and Ojibwa tribes giving accurate accounts of their life, belief and customs. Tanner's descriptions are intimate not only because he was raised by these people

but also because he grew to love and respect them. Thoreau must have been envious of such a captivity and read with extreme interest the accounts of a captive white boy being treated by other whites as though he were Indian.

“Wain-je-tah We koon-de-win—Feast called for by dreams. Feasts of this kind may be held at any time, and no particular qualifications are necessary in the entertainer or his guests. The word *Wainjec-tah* means common, or true, as they often use it in connexion with the names of plants or animals, as *Wainje-tah*, *O-muk-kuk-ke*, means a right or proper toad, in distinction from a tree frog, or a lizzard.”

Ween-dab-was-so-win—Feast of giving names, i.e. to children—where the guest eats all in his dish. Reason given that hawks ‘never return a 2d time to what they have killed.’ “

“Menis-se-no We-koon-de-win. War feast. These feasts are made before starting, or on the way towards the enemy’s country. 2, 4, 8, or 12 men, may be called but by no means an odd number. The whole animal, whether deer, bear, or moose, or whatever it may be is cooked, and they are expected to eat it all.” —and they drink bears grease. (IN VI:349-350)

“Mythology of Algonkins” in *New York State Historical Society* (1827):

“Dogs are always chosen for this feast. Beside songs there are exhortations from the old men—whenever the speakers utter the name of the Great Spirit the audience respond ‘Kara-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!’ The first syllable being uttered in a quick & loud tone, and each



of the additional syllables fainter & quicker, until it ceases to be heard. They say the speaker touches the Great Spirit, when he mentions the name, and the effect on the audience may be compared to a blow on a tense string, which vibrates shorter & shorter until it is restored to rest." (IN VIII:353)

Edward Winslow's *Relation or Journall of the Beginning and Proceedings of the English Plantation at Plymouth in New England* (London, 1622), especially Part II "A Journey to Packanokik," gave Thoreau much insight into early English contact with New England aborigines. The following extract was used later in the composition of *Walden*.

"Indian Notebook"

"He laid us on the bed with himself, and his wife, they at the one end, and we at the other, it being only plank laid a foot from the ground, and a thin mat upon them. Two more of his chief men, for want of room, pressed by and upon us; so that we were worse weary of our lodging than of our journey." At one o'clock next day Massassoit "brought two fishes that he had shot" about thrice as big as a bream. "These being boiled, there were at least forty looked for a share in them. The most ate of them. This meal only we had in two nights & a day; and had not one of us brought a partridge we had taken our journey fasting." Fearing they should be light headed for want of sleep on account of "the savages' barbarous singing (for they used to sing themselves asleep,)" that they may get home while

they had strength, they departed—than being grieved at their entertainment. (IN I:27-28)

### *Walden*

When Winslow, after governor of the Plymouth Colony, went with a companion on a visit of ceremony to Massasoit on foot through the woods, and arrived tired and hungry at his lodge, they were well received by the king, but nothing was said about eating that day. When the night arrived, to quote their own words,—“He laid us on the bed with himself and his wife, they at the one end and we at the other, it being only plank, laid a foot from the ground, and a thin mat upon them. Two more of his chief men, for want of room, pressed by and upon us; so that we were worse weary of our lodging than of our journey.” At one o’clock the next day Massasoit “brought two fishes that he had shot,” about thrice as big as a bream; “these being boiled, there were at least forty looked for a share in them. The most ate of them. This meal only they had in two nights and a day; and had not one of us brought a partridge, we had taken our journey fasting.” Fearing that they would be light-headed for want of food and also sleep, owing to “the savages’ barbarous singing (for they used to sing themselves asleep,)” and that they might get home while they had strength to travel, they departed. As for lodging, it is true they were but poorly entertained. (*Walden* 138)

Thaddeus Culbertson’s *Journal of an Expedition to the Mauvaise Terres and the Upper Missouri in 1850* (published by the Smithsonian Institute in

1851) gave Thoreau an intimate account of a white adventurer in the Indian territories of the Northwest. Culbertson described faithfully the strange manners and customs as well as his own understandable reactions to a new culture. Thoreau extracted one such observation on Indian feasting: “Very impolite not to eat all that is given at a feast—you must eat or carry away.” (IN V:14)

## FOOD

Gookin’s *Indians in New England* is the probable source for Thoreau’s observation in “Wednesday” of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* that “Tradition says that his [Sachem Wannalancet] tribe, when at war with the Mohawks, concealed their provisions in the cavities of the rocks in the upper part of these [Amoskeag] falls. The Indians, who hid their provisions in these holes . . . affirmed ‘that God had cut them out for that purpose’” (*A Week* 324). This is probably a condensation of a longer extract in an early volume of the “Indian Notebooks.”

Bartholomew Gosnold’s *Voyage* of 1602, reprinted in the *Massachusetts Historical Collections*, was another reference for Thoreau’s notes on food and provisions: “They roasted crabs, red herrings, ground nuts, some of them as big as a hen’s egg.” (IN I:6)

He also used Weymouth’s *Voyage to the Penobscot* in 1605 from the *Massachusetts Historical Collections*: “Make bread of ‘Indian wheat’ and the natives said they made butter and cheese of the milk of tame deers. They killed whales and eat parts with peas and maise.” (IN I:11)

*Town-Histories*, which was in the Concord Library, gave Thoreau much information on the Indians of his own area: “(more and better grass

and meadows formerly. Indians raised apple trees & made cider after . . . in Northborough). (IN I:13)

Charlevoix's *Description de la Nouvelle France*: "Some wandering tribes which do not cultivate the ground eat the "trippe de Roches",<sup>9</sup> and Thoreau remarks, "nothing more insipid." (IN II:11)

Gookin's *Indians in New England*:

"Their food is generally boiled maise, or Indian corn, mixed with kidney-beans, or sometimes without. Also they frequently boil in their pottage fish and flesh of all sorts, either new taken or dried, as shads, eels, alewives or a kind of herring etc." (IN II:43)

"Also they boil in this . . . all sorts of flesh they take in hunting: as venison, beaver, bear's flesh, moose, others, rackoons, many kind that they take in hunting." (IN II:44-45)

"Their drink was formerly no other but water." (IN II:46)

Samuel de Champlain: "de petites citrouilles de la grosseur du poing, que nous mangeasmes en sallade comme concombres, qui sont tres bonnes." (IN III:28)

---

<sup>9</sup> A lichen.

From Lescarbot's *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France* Thoreau paraphrases: "At Port Royal Fraises<sup>10</sup> & Framboises<sup>11</sup> and apparently cranberries in the meadows of which he made sauce for dessert." (IN III:67)

For the following extract Thoreau probably used an English translation of François Andre Michaux's *Voyage à l'ouest des monts Alleghanys dans les états de l'Ohio, du Kentucky et du Tennessee, et retour à Charleston par les hautes-Carolines, etc.* which, as John Christie points out, was one of the most "scientific" travel accounts which Thoreau read.

"The Indians who inhabit the shores of Lake Erie & Lake Michigan, lay up a store of these nuts<sup>12</sup> for the winter, a part of which they pound in wooden mortars, & boiling the paste in water, collect the only matter which swims upon the surface, to season their aliments. (IN II:75)

Peter Kalm's *Travels into North America* (London, 1770-71), translated by John Reinhold Foster, is a detailed account of the natural history, plantations and agriculture by a young Swedish naturalist. Kalm prepared lengthy and exhaustive meteorological charts for weather patterns in eastern North America. In addition to physical data, Kahn described Swedish settlements in Delaware as well as other religious communities along the East Coast. This scientific study mentions a number of Indian practices, one of which Thoreau extracts and comments upon:

---

<sup>10</sup> Strawberries

<sup>11</sup> Raspberries.

<sup>12</sup> Of shellbark hickory.

The Indians of the sea shore collected & sold oysters & musels [*sic*] to Indians who lived higher up in the country—"for this reason you see immense numbers of oysters & musel [*sic*] shells piled up near such places, where you are certain that the Indians formerly built their huts." Thoreau adds, "*This ought to make the geologists cautious.*" (IN III:108)

Richardson's *Arctic Searching Expedition*: "Eating raw flesh 'a habit peculiar to the Eskimos.'" (IN V:5)

De Bry's *Collectio Peregrinationum*, translated into Latin with With's pictures, describes the flora and fauna, minerals and rare gems, food stuffs and the customs and manners of Carolina and Virginia aborigines. With's illustrations depict brawny and muscular savages not unlike those described in Charles Brockden Brown's novel *Edgar Huntly*. It is no wonder that Thoreau was impressed by With's illustrations. "The crates on which they partially cook & dry meats to preserve them with which the towns are sometimes surrounded and which are similar to those of Old Virginians they call Boucan." (IN VII:75)

Thoreau utilized this passage in the composition of the following lines from *The Maine Woods*: "They were smoking moose-meat on just such a crate as is represented by With, in De Bry's '*Collectio Peregrinationum*,' published in 1588, and which the natives of Brazil called *boucan*, (whence buccaneer,) on which were frequently shown pieces of human flesh drying along with the rest." (*The Maine Woods* 176)

Captain James Cook's *Journal*:

Thoreau was fascinated with Cook's account of Tahitian culture and the description of sacrificial Mories probably caught his eye: "The first thing we met worthy of note was at one of their Mories, where lay the scull bones of 26 Hogs and 6 Dogs. These all lay near to and under one of their altars. These Animals must have been offer'd as a Sacrifice to their Gods either all at once or at different times, but on what account we could not learn."

Their dogs are like the Poneinian "Toward the end of May they were turned loose, and left to provide for themselves through the summer, being sure to return to their respective homes when the snows begin to fall. Their food in the winter consists entirely of the head, entrails, backbones of salmon, which are put aside and dried for that purpose; and with this diet they are fed but sparingly." (IN XI, 276-277)

This notebook material was employed in the composition of *Cape Cod*:

"As for other domestic animals, Captain King, in his continuation of Captain Cook's Journal in 1779, says of the dogs of Kamtschatka, 'Their food in the winter consists entirely of the head, entrails, and backbones of salmon, which are put aside and dried for that purpose; and with this diet they are fed but sparingly.'" (*Cape Cod* 199)

Thoreau also used other parts of the “Indian Notebooks” in the writing of *Cape Cod*. After his heading of “Mist of Plymouth Plantation by Bradford Boston 1856,” he notes “Bradford is thought to have been the author of parts of Mourt’s Relation!” In *Cape Cod* he writes, “However, according to Bradford himself, whom some consider the author of part of ‘Mourt’s Relation,’ they who came over in the Fortune the next year were somewhat daunted when ‘they came into the harbor of Cape Cod, and there saw nothing but a naked and barren place.’” (*Cape Cod* 236-37)

John Heckewelder’s *History of the Indian Nations*:

Game—Fish—Maise, beans, pumpkins squashes—&c. “They make use of various roots of plants, fruits, nuts & berries out of the woods . . . as a seasoning to their victuals, sometimes also from necessity.”

“They commonly take 2 meals every day, which they say is enough.” (IN VIII: 234)

## CHARITY

Sebastien Rasles (*Jesuit Relations*):

“Nothing can equal the tenderness which the Indians exhibit towards their children. As soon as they are born they place them on a little piece of board covered with cloth and a small bearskin, in which they wrap them, and this is their cradle. Their mothers carry



them on their backs in a manner convenient both for the infants and themselves." (IN II:19)

Frank J. Edwards' *A Campaign in New Mexico* (1848) gave Thoreau much background and detail on the Mexican Wars which probably confirmed his views in "Civil Disobedience." Such passages as "The Indians were routed, and left seventeen bodies on the field. Three hundred and fifty head of cattle, twenty-five Mexican prisoners and a great deal of Mexican plunder were captured," (ix) must have enraged an already angry Thoreau. However, the notes he took from Edwards concerned Indian life which the soldiers had almost unwittingly observed: "They saw on the banks of the Ark[ansas] river an Ind. woman 'swinging her child, which, tied to a piece of bark, hung from the roof by a thong of deer's hide.'" (IN II:31)

*Jesuit Relations*: "The sorcerer said to him, 'You French, you love only your own children, but we cherish universally all the children of our nation.'" (IN VI:22)

## FUNERALS

Thoreau must have taken a keen interest in the exhaustive dictionary of the Huron language in Gabriel Theodat's *Le Grande Voyage du Pays de Hurons* (Paris, 1632). However, it was observations on the manners and customs and, in particular, funeral customs of the Hurons that he extracted:

Envelope them in their finest robe—always attended by some one till carried out—Make a “feast of souls.” Their women & children only lament aloud—beginning & ending to the command of the master of ceremonies. The men only wear a sad countenance with their head in their knees. . . . The friends & relations & a great crowd collect—being notified—and carry the body to the cemetary “usually at a league or short distance from the town.” (IN VIII:41)

Heckewelder's *History of the Indian Nations*:

“On the death of a principle chief, the village resounds from one end to the other with the loud lamentations of the women, among whom those who sit by the corpse distinguish themselves by the shrillness of their cries and their frantic expression of their sorrow. The scene of mourning over the dead body continues by day & by night until it is interred, the mourners being relieved from time to time by other women.” The poor have fewer mourners, perhaps only their relatives. Women treated with as much respect as men—particularly the wives of great warriors. (IN VIII:270-271)

Thoreau quotes Samuel Morton's discoveries of Indian burial grounds which had “bowls, trays, dishes, and such like trinkets.” (IN I:22)

Thoreau used Thomas Hutchinson's *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay* quite frequently as it was an accurate and scholarly work. Hutchinson draws upon William Hubbard's *General History of New England*, Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, and Daniel Neal's *History of New England*. The Indian captivity of Hannah Dustan described

in “Thursday” of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* has its source in Hutchinson’s work. He also comments on Indian burial customs: “They buried the arms<sup>13</sup> to frighten him.”<sup>14</sup> (IN I:43)

From Charlevoix’s *Description de la Nouvelle France* Thoreau paraphrases: “The Indian dies deliberately with a funeral oration to his children.” (IN II:15)

From Thaddeus Culbertson’s description of the grave yard at Fort Pierre, Canada in *Expedition to the Upper Missouri*:

“You see elevated on a scaffold supported by rough willow poles and now half broken down, a confused pile of old boxes of various lengths—old trunks and pieces of blankets hanging out.”—these contain the dead. (IN V:18)

Henry Roe Schoolcraft’s *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (six volumes from 1851-1857), is one of the most impressive governmental studies under the auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Schoolcraft states in his preface, “With all their defects of character, the Indian tribes are entitled to the peculiar notice of a people who have succeeded to the occupancy of territories which once belonged to them. They constitute a branch of the human race whose history is lost in the early and wild mutations of men.” This pioneer study of Indian culture and the Jesuit Relations were, perhaps, Thoreau’s two most important sources of information on many of the thirty categories of his own outline

---

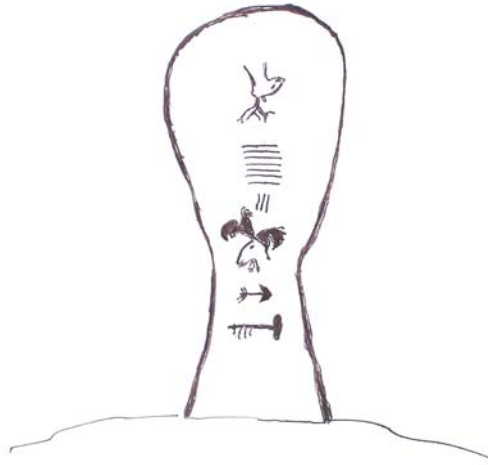
<sup>13</sup> Weapons.

<sup>14</sup> Evil Spirit.

for his intended book. The following sketch and burial custom notes come from this particular study by Schoolcraft:

Remarkable for their veneration for the dead—a sacred sentiment. Their cemeteries always “in the choicest scenic situations”—on a hill. (IN V:110)

Grave post of a warrior of the clan of the reindeer. The reversed deer signifies death. 7 marks on left as war parties he has led. The 3 perpendicular lines are 3 wounds he had—the moose head signifies a conflict with an enraged moose he had had. The arrow(?)<sup>15</sup> and pipe his influence in war & peace. (IN V:111)



Algonquin grave post sketch by Richard Fleck

---

<sup>15</sup> Thoreau's question mark.

## TRADITION AND HISTORY

Heckewelder's *History of the Indian Nations*:

"The Indians consider the earth as their universal mother. They believe that they were created within its cocoon, where for a long time they had their abode, before they came to live on its surface—as the infant is formed & takes its first growth in the womb of its natural mother."

"Some assert that they lived there in the human shape, while others, with greater consistency, contend that their existence was in the form of certain terrestrial animals, such as the ground-hog, the rabbit, & the tortoise. This was their state of preparation, until they were permitted to come out & take their station on this island (a note says 'The Indians call the Am. Cont. an island &c &c.) as the lands of the rest of the creation." (IN VIII:261)

"The tortoise, as it is commonly called, the turtle tribe, among the Lenape, claims a superiority & ascendancy over the others, because their relation, the great tortoise, a fabled monster, the Atlas of their mythology, bears according to their traditions this great island on his back, and also because he is amphibious, and can live both on land & in the water, which neither of the heads of the other tribes can do." (IN VIII:264)

Thoreau quotes Thomas Hutchinson who in turn refers to Winslow's journal as follows: "They had a tradition that a crow brought the first

grain of Indian corn; and although this bird often robbed their fields, not one Indian in a hundred would kill them.” (IN I:44)

From the *Massachusetts Historical Collections* Thoreau extracts the following legend or tradition of the Cape Cod Indians, which he later employed in his *Journal*.

#### “Indian Notebook”

“In former times, a great many moons ago, a bird, extraordinary for its size used often to visit the south shore of Cape Cod, and carry from thence to the South-ward, a vast number of small children. Maushop, who was an Ind. Giant, as fame reports, resided in these parts. Enraged at the loss of many of the children he, on a certain time, waded into the sea in pursuit of the bird till he had crossed the sound and reached Nantucket. Before Maushop forded the sound, the island was unknown to the aborigines of America. Tradition says, that Maushop found the bones of the children in a heap under a huge tree. He then wishing to smoke a pipe, searched the island for tobacco; but finding none, filled his pipe with poke a weed which the Ind. Sometimes used as its substitute. Ever since the above men[tioned] memorable event, *fogs* have been frequent at Nantucket even the Cape. In allusion to this tradition when the aborigines observed a fog rising, they would say, ‘there comes old Maushop’s smoke.’” (IN I:77)

## Journal

According to Alden . . . Nantucket was discovered by a famous old Indian Giant named Man-shop, who waded the sea to it, and there filling his pipe with “poke,” his smoke made fog. Whence that island is so much in the fog, and the aborigines on the opposite portion of the Cape, seeing a fog over the water at a distance, would say. “There comes old Maushop’s smoke.” (*Journal* IX:448-449)

## “Indian Notebook”

“They say ‘the Great Spirit’ gave the white man a plough, and the red man a bow & arrow, and sent them into the world and different paths, each to get his living in his ‘own way.’” (IN I:78)

Henry Roe Schoolcraft’s *Oneota; or Characteristics of the Red Race of America* gave Thoreau valuable insight into the folklore and religion as well as language of North American Indians. *Oneota* includes such tales as “The White Stone Canoe,” “The Lynx and the Hare” and “Shingebiss” which Thoreau extracts:

“There was once a Shingebiss,<sup>16</sup> living alone, in a solitary lodge, on the shores of the deep bay of a lake, in the coldest winter weather. The ice had formed on the water, and he had but four logs of wood to keep his fire. Each of these, would, however, burn a month, and

---

<sup>16</sup> The arms of a kind of duck.

as there were but four cold winter months, they were sufficient to carry him through the spring. He would dive through the ice for fish apparently defying the cold and Kabobonnicca (a personification of the N.W.<sup>17</sup>) tested his perseverance by giving even colder blasts and Shingebiss simply put on a log in fire and sang:

Windy god, I know your plan  
You are but my fellow man,  
Blow you may your coldest breeze,  
Shingebiss you cannot freeze,  
Sweep the strongest wind you can,  
Shingebiss is still your man,  
Heigh! for life—and ho! for bliss  
Who so free as Shingebiss?  
Ka Neej Ka Neej  
Be In Be In  
Bon In Bon In  
Oc Ee Oc Ee  
Ca we-ja! Ca we-ja” (IN III:93-94)

Ephraim Squier’s *Serpent Symbol in America* (1851) describes the Indian’s worship of nature in general and of serpents in particular with a good deal of emphasis on primitive mythology. Thoreau extracts one such myth of the Algonquin tribe:

---

<sup>17</sup> North Wind.



I find an Algonquin tradition of the evil serpent-describing a contest between the great teacher Manabozho, and a great serpent, the spirit of evil, which involves the destruction of the earth by water, (there is a facsimile copy in pictured signs in the Am. Review for Nov. '48 from which I extract the following): "Manabozho having actually wounded the great serpent with his arrow the latter in revenge deluges the earth. Then he<sup>18</sup> gathered together timber, and made a raft, upon which the men and women, and the animals that were with him, all placed themselves. No sooner had they done so, than the rising floods closed over the mountain, and they floated alone on the surface of the waters. And then they floated for many days, and some died, and the rest became sorrowful, and reproached Manabozho that he did not disperse the waters and renew the earth, that they might live. But though he knew that his great learning was by this time dead, yet could not Manabozho renew this world unless he had some earth in his hands wherewith to begin the work. And this he explained to those that were with him, and he said that were it ever so little, even a few grains of earth, then could he dispense the waters, and renew the world. Then the beaver volunteered to go to the bottom of the deep and get some earth, and they all applauded her design. She plunged in; they waited long, and when she returned, she was dead; they opened her hands. But there was no earth in them. 'Then said the otter, 'will I seek the earth:' and the bold swimmer dived from the raft. The otter was gone still longer than the beaver, but, when he returned to the surface, he too was dead, and there was no earth in his claws. 'Who shall find the earth,'

---

<sup>18</sup> Manabozho.

exclaimed all those on the raft, 'now that the beaver and the otter are dead.' And they despaired more than before, repeating, 'Who shall find the earth?' 'That will I,' said the muskrat, and he quickly disappeared between the logs of the raft. The muskrat was gone very long, much longer than the other, and it was though he would never return, when he suddenly rose near by, but he was too weak to speak, and he swam slowly towards the raft. He had hardly got upon it when he too died from his great exertion. They opened his little hands, and there, closely clasped between the fingers, they found a few grains of fresh earth. These Manabozho carefully collected and dried them in the sun, and then he rubbed them into a fine powder in his palms, and, rising up, he blew them abroad upon the waters. No sooner was this done than the flood began to subside, and soon the trees on the mountains were seen, and then the mountains and hills emerged from the deep, and the plains and the valleys came in view and the waters disappeared from the land, leaving no trace but a thick sediment, which was the dust that Manabozho had blown abroad from the raft." (IN III, 96-99)

Adriaen Van der Donck's *Description of the New Netherlands* (1655) contains detailed information on the discovery of New York, its people, the flora and fauna, geography and climate. It not only gave Thoreau much knowledge about Indian social customs, languages, food and clothing but also acquainted him with Mohawk legends and myths, one of which he copied into Volume IV of the "Indian Notebooks":

“They say the world was before all mountains, men and animals; that God then was with that beautiful woman, who now is with him, without knowing when or from whence they came; there was all water, or the water covered all; and they add that if there had been any eyes in being, there was nothing but water to be seen,—it happened at this period, they say, that the before mentioned beautiful woman—or goddess, gradually descended from heaven, even into the water, gross or corpulent like a women who apparently would bring forth more than one child. Having gradually settled into the water, she did not go under it; but immediately at the place where she descended, some land appeared under her, where on she remained sitting. This land increased, and in time became greater and dry around the place where she sat; like one who is placed on a bar, whereon the water is 3 or 4 feet deep, which by the ebbing of the tide becomes dry land. This they say—it occurred with this descended goddess. And that the land became of greater extent around her, until its extent was unbounded to the sight, when vegetation appeared; and in time fruitful and unfruitful trees began to grow throughout the world as it now appears. Whether the world of which you speak originated at this time, we cannot say. At this period—when those things—were accomplished, this great person was overtaken in labor, and brought forth three distinct and different creatures. The first was like a deer as those now are, the second like a bear, and the third like a wolf in every respect. The woman suckled those animals to maturity, and remained a considerable time upon the earth, cohabiting with these several animals and bringing forth at every birth more than one of a

different species and appearance; from which have originated and proceeded all the human beings, animals and creatures of every description and species, as the same now are and appear;—When all those subjects were brought to a state of perfection, and could continue, this common mother rejoiced greatly, and ascended up to heaven, where she will continue to dwell, enjoying pleasure, and richness in goodness and love, which her upper Lord will afford her, for which she is particularly desirous, and God also loves her supremely above all things. Here on earth, in the meanwhile, the human species, and the animals after their kind have multiplied and produced so many different creatures, and increased exceedingly, which every other thing that was created also does, as the same at present is seen. Therefore it is at this time, that all mankind, wherever they be, are always born with a nature of one or the other of the aforesaid animals. They are timid and innocent like the deer; they are brave, revengeful. . . like the bear; or they are deceitful and blood-thirsty like the wolves. Although their dispositions are apparently somewhat changed, this they attribute to the subtlety of men who know how to conceal their wicked propensities” (IN IV, 54-58).

Thoreau reacts to Schoolcraft’s Indian studies by commenting that the Indian’s “ancient history is mythology.” (IN V:52)

Their ancient history or mythology—"Nations creeping out of the ground—a world growing out, of a tortoise's back—the globe reconstructed from the earth clutched in a muskrat's paw after a deluge. A mammoth bull jumping over the great lakes; a grape-vine carrying a whole tribe across the Mississippi; an eagle's wings producing the phenomenon of thunder, or its flashing eyes that of lightning; men stepping in viewless tracks of the blue arch of heaven; the rainbow made a baldrick; a little boy catching the sun's beams in a wave; hawks rescuing ship-wrecked mariners from an angry ocean, and carrying them up a steep ascent in leather bags." (IN V:53-54)

Commenting on the nature of Indian mythology Thoreau writes they "see the great spirit in everything." (IN V:55)

"He constantly speaks,—when his traditions are probed, of having lived in 'a better state; of having spoken a better and purer language, and of more having been under the government of chiefs who exercised a energetic power.'" (IN V:56)

"Seeing many quadrupeds which burrow in the earth, they<sup>19</sup> acknowledge a similar and mysterious relation. Tecumsah affirmed as 'accordance with their notion, that the earth was his mother; and

---

<sup>19</sup> Oneotas.

Nuchabou held that the birds and beasts were his brothers.” (IN V:59)

“The Osages believe that the first man of their nation came out of a shell, and that this man, when walking on earth, met with the Great Spirit, who asked him where he resided & what he eats. The Osage answered, that he had no place of residence, and that he eats nothing. The Great Spirit gave him a bow & arrows, and told him to go a hunting. As soon as the Great Spirit left him, he killed a deer. The Great Spirit gave him fire and told him to cook his meat & to eat. He also told him to take the skin and cover himself with it, and also the skins of other animals that he would kill. Finally he married a beaver by whom he had many children & they formed the Osage people. Hence the Osages do not kill the beaver.” (IN V:100)

“The Pollawatomnies say that when there was but a single young man & his sister in the world—the young man told his sister that he had dreamed that 5 visitors would come to her lodge door—but the Great Spirit had forbidden her to look at the first four—the first of the five strangers that called was Asanna, or tobacco, and having been repulsed he fell down & died; the second, Wapako, or a pumpkin, shared the same fate; the third, Eshkossiman, or melon, and the fourth, Kokeed, or the bean, met the same fate. But when Tamin, or Montamin, which is moose, presented himself; she opened the skin tapestry door of her lodge, and laughed very heartily, and gave him a friendly reception. They were immediately married, and from his union the Indians sprung. Tamin forthwith

buried the four unsuccessful suitors, and from their graves there grew tobacco, melons of all sorts, and beans; and in this manner the Great Spirit provided that the race which he had made, should have something to offer him as a gift in their feasts and ceremonies." (IN V:100-101)

"The Island of the Blessed; or the Hunter's dream." The story of a young hunter whose betrothed died the day he was to have married her—& how he set out to find the path to the land of souls—how he found it & succeeded on his way till he came to a lake where there was a canoe by the shore. "He immediately entered the canoe, and took the paddles in his hands, when, to his joy and surprise, on turning around he beheld the object of his search in another canoe, exactly its counterpart in everything & discerned to be the shadow of his own. She had exactly imitated his motions, and they were side by side. They at once pushed out from the shore & began to cross the lake. Its waves seemed to be rising, and at a distance, looked ready to swallow them up; but just as they entered the . . . edge of them, they seemed to melt away, as if they were but the images of waves. But no sooner was one wreath of foam passed than another wave threatening both, rose up. Thus they were in perpetual fear; but what added to it was the clearing of the water, through which they could see heaps of the bones of beings who had perished before. 'The Master of Life had however, decreed to let them pass, for the thoughts & acts of neither of them had been bad. But they saw many others struggling & sinking in the waves. Old men & young men, males & females, of all ages & ranks were there;

some passed & some sank. It was only the little children whose canoes seemed to meet no waves. At length every difficulty was gone, as in a moment, and they both leaped out on the happy island. They felt that the very air was food. It strengthened & nourished them.”—But all was a dream. (IN V:102-104)

In Volume VII of the Notebooks (185-188), Thoreau extracts the legend of Hiawatha, or the Origin of the Onondaga Council-Fire, from Schoolcraft who was also Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s source.

John Heckewelder’s *Mission to the Delaware and Mohegan Indians* (1820) furnished Thoreau with a clear picture of the missionary process: the initial rejection by the Indian of white ways in preference to his native wilderness; the gradual arousing of the Indian’s interest in Scripture; the selling of Indian wilderness territories and the final settlement of the Indian in white Christian communities. Heckewelder’s constant opposition to the “backwoodsman” contention that the Indian had no more soul than a buffalo must have gained Thoreau’s deep sympathy, but the legends and traditions of the Delaware and Mohegan tribes were the most interesting to Thoreau:

“Indian tradition said in 1772 about 30 years before an Indian hermit who was a magician dwelt there & killed travellers & hunters. At last he was killed by a valiant chief—But fabulous reports add, that the heroic chief having burnt the hermit’s bones to ashes, he threw them into the air to be blown off, but instead of this, the ashes turned into ‘Powksak,’ sand flies.” (IN VII:322)



"Mythology of Algonkins" from the *New York State Historical Society* (1827):

"The Nautorway Indians have a fable of an old man and woman who watched an ant heap until they saw the little insects changed to white men." (IN VII:368)

"Bosh-ke-dosh,—In Algonquin mythology a tiny animal in the original class of quadrupeds. He was found among the blades of grass, and taken up in his hand by an adventurer, who became his protege. This little animal, the name of which appears to signify *hair blown off skin*, had the power to enlarge his own size by the shake a dog gives himself, which is called *pup-poulve*. This he repeated, enlarging at every shake, till he reached an enormous size. In a word, this tiny thing grew to be the Mastadon." (IN VI:478)

*Transactions of the Historical and Literary Committee of the American Philosophical Society* (1819):

"Among the Delawares, those of the Minsi, or wolf tribe, say that in the beginning, they dwelt in the earth under a lake, and were fortunately extricated from this unpleasant abode by the discovery which one of their men made of a hole, through which he ascended to the surface; on which, as he was walking he found a deer, which he carried back with him into his subterranean habitation; that there the deer was eaten, and he and his companions found the meat so good, that they unanimously determined to leave their dark abode,

and remove to a place where they could enjoy the light of heaven, have much excellent game in abundance." (IN VIII:266-267)

Thoreau makes a notation, I assume for their possible incorporation of Indian traditions, to read Freneau's poems on Indian subjects. (IN VIII:442)

J. W. Barber's *Massachusetts Historical Collections*: "Bug ate out of a table in Williamstown 73 years after the egg was laid." (IN I:1)

While Thoreau has only a skeletal recording of this legend from J.W. Barber, it must have impressed his memory so strongly that he employed it in the conclusion of *Walden*: "Every one has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts,—from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this?" (*Walden* 324)

Interesting houses - localities &c. as most  
 mentioned in Barber's Hist. Coll.  
 Bug ate out of a table in Williamstown 73  
 years after the egg was laid.  
 Leonard's forge with trees in Raynham.  
 first iron forge in Am. Still in use.  
 Grave dwell of William Blackstone of  
 Boston Peninsula - in Cumberland R.I.  
 near Blackstone River.  
 Gossnold's Wore-house - cellar of built 160  
 merrimack rose 21 feet at Bradford in 18  
 houses, habits of our ancestors in Lewis' Hist. of  
 Ancient house in Deerfield (pulled down) <sup>new built door</sup> near 18  
 Stone Ind. relics in Westfield Academy  
 - Barber's acc. with a Mr. Jocillet & Mr. Earl of  
 New Haven who in 1785 visited these parts & drew  
 & engraved 4 drawings - 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of Lexington -  
 2<sup>nd</sup> A view of the Town of Concord. (with the troops de-  
 trooping the store) 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of the North Bridge  
 at Concord. 4<sup>th</sup> the South part of Lexington  
 (where Percy met them)  
 First relics of first prints. in this country  
 Fortance in Spear's (an Indian) Hill in Little  
 ton. Old garison house S.E. Nashua now 170  
 years old.  
 Ancient oak in Dedham.  
 Ancient house in Medfield standing when town was burned  
 Old church in Hingham built 1680  
 and relics at Pilgrim Hall Plymouth  
 Oldest house in N.E. in Dartmouth  
 Miss Goodenow's grave in North Long's killed by Ind. 1790  
 French Portland fort & mine in Oxford

Indian Notebooks: volume 1, page 1

From William Hubbard Thoreau paraphrases the following historical data:  
 "The Indian powows got together in a swamp and for 3 days incessantly  
 tried to curse the English & prevent their settling—but failing they came  
 into Plymouth and made friendship with them—as with Passaconaway."  
 (IN I:17)

Rasles' *Jesuit Relations*:

"Great Chief," you have told us not to unite with the Frenchman in case that you declare war against him. Know that the Frenchman is my brother; we have one and the same Prayer both for him and ourselves, and we dwell in the same cabin at two fires, he is at one fire and I am at the other fire. (IN II:22-23)

Heckewelder's "Indian Tradition" in *New York Historical Collections*:

"A long time ago, when there was no such thing known to the Indians as people with a white skin (their expressions), some Indians who had been out a-fishing, and, where the sea widens, espied at a great distance something remarkably large, swimming, or floating on the water, and such as they had never seen before. They immediately returning to the shore apprised their countrymen of what they had seen; and pressed them to go out with them and discover what it might be. These together turned out, and saw to their great surprise the phenomenon, but could not agree what it might be; some concluding it either to be an uncommonly large fish, or other animal, while others were of opinion it must be some very large house. It was at length agreed among those who were spectators, that as this phenomenon moved towards the land, whether or not it was an animal, or anything that had life in it, it would be well to inform all the Indians on the inhabited islands of what they had seen, and put them on their guard. Accordingly, they sent runners and watermen off to carry the news to their scattered

chiefs, that these might send off in every direction for warriors to come in. These arriving in numbers, and themselves viewing the strange appearance, and that it was actually moving towards them, (the entrance of the river or bay) concluded it to be a large canoe or house, in which the great Mannitto (Great or Supreme Being) *himself* was, and that he probably was coming to visit them. By this time the chiefs of the different tribes were assembled on York Island, and were counselling (or deliberating) on the manner they should receive their Mannitto on his arrival. Every step had been taken to be well provided with a plenty of meal for a sacrifice; the women were required to prepare the best of victuals; idols or images were examined and put in order,-and a grand dance was supposed not only to be an agreeable entertainment for the Mannitto, but might, with the addition of a sacrifice, contribute towards appeasing him, in case he was angry with them. The councillors were also set to work, to determine what the meaning of this phenomenon was, and what the result would be. Both to these and to the chiefs & wise men of the nation, men, women, and children were looking up for advice & protection. Between hope & fear and in confusion, a dance commenced. While in this situation, fresh runners arrive declaring it a house of various colors, and crowded with living creatures. It now appears to be certain that it is the Great Mannitto bringing them some kind of game, such as they had not before, but other runners soon after arriving, declare it a large house of various colors, full of people, yet of quite a different color than they (the Indians) are of: that they were also dressed in a different manner from them and that one in particular appeared altogether red, which must be the

Mannitto himself. They are soon hailed from the vessel, though in a language they do not understand; yet they shout (or yell) in their way. Many are for running off to the woods, but are pressed by others to stay, in order not to give offense to their visitors, who could find them out, & might destroy them. The house (or large canoe, as some will have it) stops, and a smaller canoe comes ashore with the red man and some others in it; some stay by this canoe to guard it. The chief and wise men (or councillors) had composed a large circle, into which the red-clothed man with two others approached. He salutes them with friendly countenance, and they return the salute after their manner. They are lost in admiration, both as to the color of the skin . . . as also to their manner of dress, yet most as to the habit of him who wore the red clothes, which shone with something they could not account for. He *must* be the great Mannitto (Supreme Being,) they think, but why should he have a *white skin*? A large bottle is brought forward by one of the (supposed) Mannitto's servants, and from this a substance is poured into a small cup (or glass) and handed to Mannitto. The (expected) Mannitto drinks; has the glass filled again, and hands it to the chief next to him to drink. The chief receives the glass but only smelleth at it, and passes it on to the next chief, who does the same. The glass thus passes through the circle without the contents being tasted by any one; and to upon the point of being returned again to the red-clothed man, when one of their number, a spirited man and great warrior jumps out—harrangues the assembly on the impropriety of returning the glass with the contents in it; that the same was handed them by the Mannitto in order that they should drink it, as he

himself had done before them; that this would please him; but to return what he had given to them might provoke him, and be the cause of their being destroyed by him. And that, since he believed it for the good of the nation that the contents offered them should be drank, and as none was willing to drink it, he would, let the consequences be what it would; and that it was better for one man to die, than a whole nation to be destroyed. He then took the glass and bidding the assembly a farewell, drank it off. Every eye was fixed on their resolute companion to see what an effect this would have upon him. And he soon beginning to stagger about, and at last dropping to the ground, they bemoan him. He falls into a sleep, and they view him as expiring. He awakes again, jumps up, and declares that he never felt himself before so happy as after he had drank the cup. Wishes for more. His wish is granted; and the whole assembly soon joins him, and become intoxicated." [he (Heckewelder) says in a note at this place, on York Island, Mannahattanick—and have told him that it means the place of general *intoxication* . . . ]

Thoreau continues copying the legend to the effect that gifts were given to the Indians for the ulterior purpose of getting land, and "they and the whites lived for a long time contentedly together, although these asked from time to time more land of them; and proceeding higher up the Mahicanittuk (Hudson River,) they believed they would soon want all their country, and which at this time was already the case." (IN IV, 25-34)

Samuel Morton:

“The year of the Mexicans consisted like our own of 365 days, but instead of 12 it was divide into 18 months, each of 20 days. They possessed a distinct system of hieroglyphic writing, and their annals went back more than eight centuries and a half before the arrival of the Spaniards.” (IN V:42)

“The tradition of the Natchez state that they migrated from Mexico at 2 different periods.” (IN V:43)

Schoolcraft:

The small pox “swept through the Missouri Valley in 1837.” The first case was a colored<sup>20</sup> mulatto man on board a steam boat 80 miles above Fort Leavenworth. “Every precaution appears to have been taken, by sending runners to the Indians, 2 days ahead of the boat; but, in spite of these efforts, the disease spread. It broke out among the Mandonis[?] about the 15th of July. This tribe, which consisted of 1600 persons, was reduced to 31 souls,” & other tribes lost one half of their number. (IN V:33)

Thoreau quotes Cotton Mather on the Massachusetts Indian as saying that they called an Englishman a “*knife-man*.” (IN V:94)

From Schoolcraft’s *History of the Indian Tribes of the United States* Thoreau extracts another Manabozho legend:

---

<sup>20</sup> Thoreau’s alteration.



“At a certain time, a great Manito came on earth, and took a wife of men. The[y] had four sons at a birth, and died in ushering them into the world. The first was Manabozho, who is the friend of the human race,” & etc. Manabozho went to war with his brother Chokaivipok. The contests between them were frightful & long continued, and whenever they had a combat the face of nature still shows signs of it. The former killed the latter. Manabozho “taught men how to make agakwuts,<sup>21</sup> lances & arrow-points, and all implements of bone and stone, and also how to make snares and traps, and nets, to take animals, and birds, and fishes.” His brother Chibiabos was drowned under ice by the Manitos—but they afterwards brought him to life. “They gave him, though, a drink of burning coal, and told him to go and preside over the country of souls. Manabozho traverses the whole earth. He is the friend of man. He killed the ancient monsters whose bones we now see under the earth; and cleared the streams and forests of many obstructions which the Bad Spirit had put there, to fit them for our residence. He has placed four good Spirits at the four cardinal points, to which we point in our ceremonies. The spirit at the North gives snow & ice, to enable men to pursue game & fish. The Spirit of the South gives melons, maize, and tobacco. The Spirit of the West gives rain, and the Spirit of the East light; and he commands the sun to make his daily walks around the earth. Thunder is the voice of these Spirits to whom we offer the smoke of sa-maw (tobacco).” (IN V:98-100)

---

<sup>21</sup> Axes.

Thoreau's notes from Henry Roe Schoolcraft's *History of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (1851-1857) in six volumes are characterized by whimsical tales, the importance of the seasons to Indians, and the importance of friendship and unity as evidenced by Chief Hiawatha. Notes from Schoolcraft here follow. It is important to observe that *Indian Notebooks* volumes V and VI were written by Thoreau in the early 1850s. Volumes VII and VIII were written in the mid-1850s and IX, X, and XI in the late 1850s and early 1860s.

From *The Magic Circle in the Prairie*: "A young hunter found a circular path one day in a prairie without any trail leading to or from it." He hid himself in the grass & found that 12 beautiful girls came down from heaven (in) an osier car with music, & leaping out began to dance.

He tried in many occasions to seize the youngest & finally by changing himself into a mouse succeeded . He took her home to his lodge & she bore him a beautiful boy. But she was the daughter of a star "and the scenes of earth began to fall upon her sight, wished to visit her father."

"She remembered the dream that would carry her up" so one day when Algon was hunting she constructed a wicker basket—took her son to the charmed ring—commenced her song & rose into the skies—The sound of her singing was wafted to her husband's ear, but he arrived too late to detain them.

She finally returned for her husband—but they all at length returned to earth in the form of white hawks which they still retain.  
(IN V:104-105)

“The genii and spirits who inhabit the solid ground are covered, during the winter season, by beds of snow, and the lakes, and rivers with ice, which make them insensible to hearing. The fanciful & grotesque tales that are told in the winter lodge, where the old and young are crowded together, often produce jeers and remarks from the listeners, and create merriment which would be offensive to the genii if they were overheard.”

“As soon as the spring opens . . . these tales cease. The earth is now seminated. The snows disappear, the lakes & rivers open, the birds return to their deserted forests or streams, the leaves put forth, it is now that the spirit world in which the Indians live, assumes its most intense state of activity, and the red hunter who believes himself dependent on the spirits and genii for success in every path of life, is regardful of the least word which might give offense to these newly awakened powers.”<sup>22</sup> (IN VII:204-5)

“Hiawatha, or the Oirign of the Onandaga Council Fire” (Derived from the verbal narrations of the late Abraham Le Fort, an Onandaga Chief, who was a graduate, it is believed, of Geneva College.) “Tarenyawago taught the Six Nations arts & knowledge. He had a canoe which could move without paddles. It was only necessary to wish it, to compel it to go. With this he ascended the streams & lakes. He taught the people to raise corn & beans, removed obstructions from their water courses and made their fishing—grounds clear. He helped to get the mastery over the great

---

<sup>22</sup> [Here again we see Thoreau’s interest in the rich linkage between the Indian’s language and nature.]

monsters which over ran the country, and thus prepared the forests for their hunters. His wisdom was as great as his power. The people listened to him with admiration and followed his advice gladly. There was nothing in which he did not excel good hunters, brave warriors, and eloquent orators."

"He gave them wise instructions for observing the laws and maxims of the Great Spirit. Having done these things, he laid aside the high powers of his public missions, and resolved to set them an example of how they should live. For this purpose, he selected a beautiful spot (on the shores of a lake) erected his lodge—planted his field of corn, kept by him his magic canoe, and selected a wife & dropt his old name & took that of Hiawatha, meaning a person of very great wisdom," was very much respected & consulted—became a member of the Onandaga tribe & only used his 'magic canoe' when he went to attend councils. At length there arose suddenly great alarm at the invasion of a fierce band of warriors from the north of the Great Lakes. The council was assembled, Hiawatha was sent. He arrived. (Then a story of the fall of something like a meteor one would say . . .—but it was called a great white bird[.]) He advised the tribes to unite into band—"Listen to me by tribes.

You (the Mohawks), who are sitting under the shadow of the Great Tree, whose roots sink deep in the earth . . . and whose branches spread wide around, shall be the first nation, because you are war—like & mighty.<sup>23</sup> You (the Onandagas), who have your

---

<sup>23</sup> [Thoreau's notes on the Oneydoes (second nation, the Oneidas) are illegible.]

habitation at the foot of the Great Hills, and are overshadowed by their crags, shall be the third nation, because you are all greatly gifted in speech.

“You (the Senecas), whose dwelling is in the Dark Forest, and whose home is everywhere, shall be the fourth nation, because of your superior aiming in hunting.”

“And you (the Cayugas), the people who live in the Open Country, and possess much wisdom, shall be the fifth nation, because you understand better the art of raising corn and beans, and making house.”

“Unite, you 5 nations, and have one common interest, and no foe shall disturb & subdue you. You, the people who are as the public wishes, and you, who are a fishing people may place yourselves under our protection, and we will defend you. And you of the south & of the west may do the same, and we will protect you. We earnestly desire the attention & friendship of you all.”

“Brothers, if we unite in this great band, the Great Spirit will smile upon us, and we shall be free, prosperous, & happy. But if we remain as we are, we shall be subject to his frown. We shall be enslaved, ruined, perhaps, annihilated. We may perish under the war – storm, and our names be no longer remembered by good men, not be repeated in the dance & song.”

“Brothers, these are the words of Hiawatha, I have said it. I am done.” He took his scat<sup>24</sup> in his canoe – music was heard in the air – & he disappeared in the heavens.<sup>25</sup> (IN VII:185-88)

---

<sup>24</sup> He took his leave.

As one would expect, Thoreau's notes from the multi-volumed seventeenth-century Jesuit Relations (1632–1673) concern richly poetic mythic origins and, more importantly, religious beliefs of Algonquin Indians about the afterlife.

*Jesuit Relations of 1635:*

“They<sup>26</sup> say that a certain woman named Eataentsic, is that one who has made the earth & men. They give her for associate a certain one called Iouskeha, who they say is her grandson, with whom she governs the world; this Iouskeha has care of the living & things which concern life, and consequently they say that he is good. Eataentsic has care of souls, and because they think that she makes men die, they say she is bad. And there are among their mysteries so concealed that is only the old men who can speak for them with credit & authority to be believed.”

“Eataentsic fell from heaven—and when she fell she was enceinte.”<sup>27</sup> (IN VI:77-78)

*Jesuit Relations of 1636:* “A certain woman Ataentsic working in her field in heaven saw a bear—her dog persued[,] she after & all fell through a hole to earth (or rather water) which afterward became dry—she being pregnant[.]” (IN VI:96)

---

<sup>25</sup> Thoreau, perhaps, saw natural harmony in Hiawatha's words which was in marked contrast to the state of his own nation at the time.

<sup>26</sup> Hurons.

<sup>27</sup> Pregnant.

Others say that her husband was sick & thinking it would heal him to cut the tree on which they all lived in heaven, she struck it for him, it tumbled down here, she jumped after, the tortoise saw her coming, advised the animals to dive & bring up earth & pile it on his back in which she was received. She soon brought forth 2 boys Taoiscanon & Toskeha, who quarrelled—for arms[.] The last had a deer's horn; the other son fruits of the wild rose—lousekaha wounded the other & from his blood were produced stones such as they strike the steel with in France—he finally killed him—This is the origin of the nation. Others say that in the beginning a man dwelt on an island with a fox & a little animal like a polecat which they call Tsohendaia. The man not liking his confinement asked the fox to dive but he only wetting his paws he threw him in & drowned him—but the other dived so smartly that he hit his nose against the bottom and came up with it covered with mud and thereafter he was so industrious that he increased the isle with all these fields .

Ioskeha is the sun[,], Aetaentsic the moon and their cabin is at the end of the earth. Tells of young man who went to find the former who concealed them from the latter who would have injured them. Others say that first the world was dry & all the water was under the armpit of a great hog here above[.] Ioskeha got what he used—at length the latter resolved to make an incision—let out the water & made all the rivers—lakes—& seas.

Without Ioskeha their kettle would not boil. Who he learned to make fire from [was] the tortoise. At first he kept the animals shut

up in a great cavern at last concluded to let them out that they might multiply, but so that he could recover them again “As they went out of this cave he wounded all of them in the foot with an arrow, nevertheless the wolf avoided his shot, whence it comes, say they, that they have the trouble to catch it a la course.” He gave them corn & makes it grow.

“At the feast of the Dead which is made about every 12 years, souls quit the cemeteries, and as some say are changed into turtledoves—but the most common belief is that they go off in company after this ceremony “covered as they are with robes & collars” to a great village towards the setting sun—but the old men and children who can’t travel so well remain here in their private villages.—“They hear sometimes they say the noise of the doors of their cabins, and the voices of the children who chase the birds from their fields, they saw corn in its season, and make use of the fields which the living have abandoned; if some village is burned which often happens in this country, they are careful to collect from the middle of the burning the roasted corn and make of it part of their provision.”

Of those who go west—each nation has a separate village. “The souls of those who have died in war make a band apart, the others fear them, and do not permit them to enter their village anymore than they do the souls of those who have made way with themselves.” (IN V:96-98)



“Another told me that on the same route<sup>28</sup> before arriving at the village, one comes to a cabin, where dwells a certain one named Oseotarach; or Pierce—head (Perce—Teste), who draws the brain from the heads of the dead, & keeps it; it is necessary to pass a river & for all bridge you have only the trunk of a tree fallen across, & supported very slightly. The passage is guarded by a dog who donne le sault<sup>29</sup> to many souls & takes them all off; they are at the same time carried off by the violence of the torrent & drowned.”

Some who had been resuscitated told these things to them.  
(IN V:98)

Notes from David Cusick’s *Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations* (Lockport, N.Y, 1848) concern the human race’s mythic origins:

“Among the ancients there were 2 worlds in existence .” The lower world was in a great darkness; the possession of the great monster; but the upper world was inhabited by mankind; and there was a woman conceived & would have twins born. When her travail drew near, “she lay down on a mattrass & the place sank down with her toward the dark world. The monsters assembled in great alarm—one is appointed to obtain some earth—another to support her. She was received on a great turtle with a little earth on his back[.] While holding here, the turtle increased every moment & became a

---

<sup>28</sup> To the village of the dead.

<sup>29</sup> Jumps.

considerable island of earth, and apparently covered with small bushes." Soon the twins were born & the mother died at once. The turtle became a great island & the children grew up—"one of them possessed with a gentle disposition, and named *Eniogorio*, i.e., the good mind. The other possessed an insolence of character, and was named *Enigonhahetgea*, i.e., the bad mind." The good mind "was anxious to create a great light in the dark world; but the bad mind was desirous that the world should remain in a natural state." The former out of his parent's head & body created sun, moon & stars. He formed also rivers, plants & animals—especially man, a male & female & "named them *Ea give hove* i.e., a real people." In the meanwhile the bad mind made high *mts*, falls of water, reptiles &c which the good mind removed again. The bad mind trying to make people succeeded only in making 2 apes—but the good mind afterwards gave them living souls—A note says "It appears by fictitious accounts, that the said beings became civilized people & made their residence in the southern parts of the Island; but afterwards they were destroyed by the barbarous nations, & their fortifications were ruined unto this day." Finally the 2 brothers fight & good mind conquers & destroys the bad mind "and the last words uttered from the bad mind were that he would have equal power over the souls of mankind after death; and he sinks down to eternal doom, and became the Evil Spirit."

The good mind then retired from the earth. (IN IX:110-111)

Thoreau also made notes from the Quaker Indian historian John Heckwelder's *An Account of the History, Manners and Customs of the Indian*

*Nations* (Philadelphia, 1819). In what follows we see notes on mythic origins, the sacredness of animal-human relations, and a prophecy.

“The Indians<sup>30</sup> considered the earth as their universal mother. They believed that they were created within its bosom, where for a long time they had their abode, before they came to live on its surface—as the infant is formed & takes its first growth in the womb of its natural mother.”

“Some assert that they lived there in the human shape, while others, with greater consistency, contend that their existence was in the form of certain terrestrial animals, such as the groundhog, the rabbit, & the tortoise. This was their state of preparation, until they were permitted to come out & take their station on this island (a note says, ‘The Indians call the Am. cont. an island’ &c.) as the Lords of the rest of the creation.” (IN VII:261)

“An old Indian told me about 50 years ago, that when he was young, he still followed the custom of his father & ancestors in climbing upon a high mountain or pinnacle, to thank the Great Spirit for all the benefits before bestowed, and to pray for a continuance of his favor.” (IN VIII:166-67)

“Tradition—That they<sup>31</sup> had dwelt in the earth where it was dark and where no sun did shine. That though they followed hunting, they ate mice, which they caught with their hands. That

---

<sup>30</sup> Deleware.

<sup>31</sup> Iroquois.

*Ganawagabba* (one of them) having accidentally found a hole to get out of the earth at, he went out, and that in walking about on the earth he found a deer, which he took back with him; and that both on account of the meat tasting so very good, and the favorable description he had given them of the country above and on the earth, their mother concluded it best for them all to come out; that accordingly they did so, and immediately set about planting corn, &c. That, however, the *Nocharauorsul*; that is, the groundhog, would not come out but had remained in the ground as before." (IN VIII:263)

". . . in the year 1762 when I resided at Tuscorawas on the Muskingum, I was told by some of them, that there were some animals which Indians did not eat, and among them were the *rabbit* and the *ground-hog*; for, they said, they did not know but that they might be related to them! I found also that the Indians, for a similar reason, paid great respect to the rattle snake, whom they called their grandfather, and would on no account destroy him."

"That the Indians from the earliest times, considered themselves in a manner connected with certain animals, is evident from various customs still preserved among them, and from the names of those animals which they have collectively, as well as individually, assumed. It might, indeed, be supposed that those animals' names which they have given to their several tribes were mere badges of distinction, or 'coats of arms' . . . but if we pay attention to the reasons which they give for those denominations, the idea of a supposed family connexion is easily discernible. The

tortoise, or as it is commonly called, the *Turtle* tribe, among the Lenape, claims a superiority & ascendancy over the others, because their relations, the great tortoise, a fabled monster, the Atlas of their mythology, bears according to their traditions this great island on his back, and also because he is amphibious, and can live both on land & in the water, which neither of the heads of the other tribes can do. The merits of the *Turkey*, which gives its name to the 2d tribe, are that he is stationary, and always remains with or about them. As to the Wolf, after whom the 3d tribe is named, he is a rambler by nature, running from one place to another in quest of his prey ; yet they consider him as their benefactor, as it was by his means that the Indians got out of the interior of the earth. It was he, they believe, who by the appointment of the Great Spirit, killed the deer whom the Mouse found who first discovered the way to the surface of the earth, and which allured them to come out of their damp & dark residence. For that reason, the wolf is to be honored, and his name preserved forever among them. Such are their traditions as they were related to me by an old man of this tribe, more than 50 yrs. ago."

These animals' names are also national badges—coats of arms—

"The Turtle warrior draws either with a coal or paint here & there on the trees along the war path, the whole animal carrying a gun with the muzzle projecting forward, and if he leaves a mark at the place where he has made a stroke on his enemy, it will be the picture of a tortoise. Those of the Turkey tribe paint only one foot of a turkey, and the Wolf tribe, sometimes a wolf at large with one leg

& foot raised up to serve as a hand, in which the animal also carries a gun with the muzzle forward. They, however, do not generally use the word 'wolf,' when speaking of their tribe, but call themselves *P'duk-sit*, which means *round-foot* that animal having a round foot like a dog. (IN VIII:263-266)

"They are as proud of their origin from the tortoise, the turkey, & the wolf, as the nobles of Europe are of their descent from the feudal barons of ancient times, & when children spring from intermarriages between different tribes, their genealogy is carefully preserved by tradition in the family, that they may know to which tribe they belong."

As for their relations to the animals[,] "They are, in fact, according to their opinions, only the first among equals, the legitimate hereditary sovereigns of the whole animated race, of which they are themselves a constituent part."—Hence distinguish animate & inanimate instead of masculine & feminine. "All animated nature, in whatever degree, is in their eyes a great whole from which they have not yet ventured to separate themselves. They do not exclude other animals from their world of spirits, the place to which they expect to go after death."

"A Delaware hunter once shot a huge bear and broke its backbone. The animal fell and sent up a most plaintive cry, something like that of the panther when he is hungry. The hunter, instead of giving him another shot, stood up close to him, and addressed him in these words: 'Hark ye! bear, you are a coward, and no warrior as you pretend to be. Were you a warrior you would

shew it by your firmness and not cry & whimper like an old woman. You know, bear, that our tribes are at war with each other, and that yours are the aggressor. [a note says 'probably attending to a tradition which the Indians have of a very ferocious kind of bear, called the *naked bear*, which &c']—You have found the Indians too powerful for you, and you have gone sneaking about in the woods, stealing their hogs; perhaps at this time you have hog's flesh in your belly. Had you conquered me I would have borne it with courage and died like a brave warrior; but you, bear, sit here & cry, and disgrace your tribe by your cowardly conduct.' I was present at the delivery of this curious invective ; when the hunter had dispatched the bear, I asked him, how he thought that poor animal could understand what he said to it? 'Oh! said he in answer, 'the bear understood me very well; did you not observe how ashamed he looked while I was upbraiding him?'"

He also described another similar scene which he witnessed among the Wabash. (IN VIII:267-269)

"They ascribe earthquakes to the moving of the great tortoise, which bears the *Island* (Continent) on its back. They say he shakes himself or changes his position." (IN VIII:286)

"Ind. prophets, who say: 'That when the whites have ceased killing the red man, and got all their lands from them, the great tortoise which bears this island upon his back, shall dive down into the deep & drown them all, as he once did before, a "great many years ago';

and that when he again 'rises, the Indians shall once more be put in possession of the whole country .'" (IN VIII:305)

Schoolcraft: "Schoolcraft says—'There is reason to believe that the ancestors of all the principle existing tribes of America worshipped the *Eternal Fire*.'" (IN VIII:37)

John Tanner, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner*:

"O-pe-che-Robin. This social little bird seems to be not less the favorite and companion of the Indian than of the white man. They relate, that long ago, soon after Nanabush had made the ground, there was an old chief, a great & good man, who, with his wife, had one son. But this young man disregarded the advise and admonition of his parents; particularly he neglected to fast and pray, as all young men & women are enjoined to do. For many successive days had his father presented him his breakfast in one hand, and in the other offered charcoals with which to paint his face; but the ungracious son had steadily preferred the venison, or the broth to the coals. One morning he directed the old woman to make a choice kettle of Mun-da-win-aw-bo, or corn broth, and taking a bowl full of it in one hand, and as usual some coals in the other, he presented them both to his son. The young man choosing the broth, the father returned to the fire place, and taking a handful of ashes, threw it into the bowl. The young man then took the coals, & rubbing them in his hands, painted his face, and retired to the bushes near by. After he had lain 3 or 4 days, his father offered him something to eat,



but he would not accept it. This was repeated from time to time, until the 10th day; then the young man still remaining in the bushes, called his father, and his mother, and his relatives, and addressed them thus: 'My friends, it has been unpleasant to you to see me eat so much as I have eaten; hereafter I shall eat less ; but although I can no longer live with you in the lodge, I shall remain near you, and it shall be my business to forewarn you when any stranger is approaching.' He then took some red paint and put it on his face & his breast, to signify that his fast was finished, and was immediately changed to a bird called O-pe-che . Still he delights to live near the lodges of those who were his relatives; and after times taking a stand in the highest branch of a tree, he cries out n' doan-watch-e-go, n'doan-watch-e-go, to foretell that someone is coming. But having found that his prediction often proves false, he is ashamed as soon as he has uttered it, and flying down, he hides himself in thick bushes, or on the ground, crying out che! che! che! (IN VII:371-372)

#### Jesuit Relations of '36 :

"A savage having lost a sister whom he loved very much—resolved to seek her—and made 12 days' travel toward the setting sun—without eating or drinking ; at the end of which his sister appeared to him at evening, with a plate of meal cooked with water and disappeared at the same time that he wished [to] lay hands on her to stop her. — he travelled 3 whole months—she did not fail every day to show herself [& bring his food at last] he came to a river—it was very rapid & did not appear fordable ; there were

indeed some trees fallen across—There was beyond a piece of cleared land—he perceived at the entrance of the wood a little cabin, he shouts repeatedly—man finally tells him that he is at the village of souls & that “all the souls are now assembled in a cabin, where they are dancing in order to heal Aetaentsic, who is sick ; do not fear to enter, tenez voila a gourd, you will put into it the soul of your sister. — I am he who keeps the brains of the dead; when you have recovered the soul of your sister return this way, & I will give you her brain. [When he got to the cabin] they were so frightened at the sight of this man that they vanished in an instant [at evening & very gradually as he was sitting by the fire they returned and began to dance again at length after many attempts & a long struggle he succeeded in putting his sister into the gourd.] He returns by way of his host, who gives him in another gourd the brain of this sister, and informs him of all he must do in order to resuscitate her. Go to her grave [and] carry her body to your cabin & make a feast. When all the guests are assembled take it on your shoulders and make a turn through the cabin holding the 2 gourds in your hand. As soon as you have 15 done that she will immediately come to life again i.e. if all present look down & do not regard what you do. A curious one raised his eyes, & at the same time this soul escaped—”

Heckwelder :

“The Indians<sup>32</sup> considered the earth as their universal mother. They believed that they were created within its bosom, where for a long time they had their abode, before they came to live on its surface— as the infant is formed & takes its first growth in the womb of its natural mother.”

“Some assert that they lived there in the human shape, while others, with greater consistency, contend that their existence was in the form of certain terrestrial animals, such as the groundhog, the rabbit, & the tortoise. This was their state of preparation, until they were permitted to come out & take their station on this island (a note says, ‘The Indians call the Am. Cont. an island &c &c.) as the lands of the rest of the creation.” (IN VIII:261)

## MORALE

Theodat’s *Le Grand Voyage du Pays de Hurons*:

“The Algonquins . . . inasmuch as they traffick very much, & as good merchants undertake long voyages, they have *bien encore* the excuse of the chase & fishery, but they must employ themselves seriously if they wish to live.” (IN VIII:64)

---

<sup>32</sup> Deleware.

"The Indians are proud but not vain; they consider vanity as degrading and unworthy the character of a man, the hunter never boasts of his skill or strength, nor the warrior of his prowess. It is not right, they say, that one should value himself too much for an action which another may perform as well as himself, and when a man extols his own deeds, it seems as if he doubted his capability to do the like again when he pleased. Therefore they prefer in all cases to let their actions speak for themselves." (IN VIII:201-202)

"There is no nation in the world who pay[s] greater respect to old age than the Am. Indians." Not to provoke "the anger of the Great Spirit—& encouraged by the hope of receiving. . . success" themselves— (IN VIII:205)

"Insanity is not common among the Indians." (IN VIII:261)

In the preface to his *History of the American Indian; Particularly those nations advancing to the Mississippi* (London, 1775) James Adair states, "The following history, and observations, are the productions of one who hath been chiefly engaged in an Indian life ever since the year 1735; and most of the pages were written among our old friendly Chikkasah, with whom I first traded in the year 1774. The subjects are interesting, as well as amusing." Thoreau gained information on Indian morale from Adair: "They always act the part of a stoic philosopher in outward appearance, and never speak above their natural key." (IN IX:43)

## MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

Theodat's *Le Grand Voyage du Pays de Hurons*:

Many young men have concubines instead of wives. Asks consent of father & mother—adorns himself—makes her a present & if accepted comes to lie with her 3 or 4 nights—then a speach [*sic*] is made to which their friends are invited & the master of the ceremony pronounces them married & perhaps the women & girls bring each a load of wood & take up housekeeping. No dowry.

Parent & child, Mother & sister-cousins & cousins don't intermarry. (IN VIII: 26)

Heckewelder's *History of the Indian Nations*:

"There are many persons who believe from the labor that they see the Indian women perform, that they are in a manner treated as slaves. These labors indeed, are hard, compared with the tasks that are imposed upon females in civilized society—; but they are no more than their fair share, under every consideration & due allowance, of the hardships attendant on savage life. Therefore they are not only voluntary but cheerfully submitted to;" moreover they may leave their husbands when they will. "It is understood on both sides that the partners are not to live together any longer than they shall be pleased with each other. The husband may push away his wife whenever he pleases, and the woman may in like manner

abandon her husband. Therefore the connexion is not attended with any vows, promises or ceremonies of any kind."

"It is understood that the husband is to build a house for them to dwell in, to find the necessary implements of husbandry, as axes, hoes, &c. to provide a canoe, and also dishes, bowls, & other necessary vessels for housekeeping. The woman generally has a kettle or two, and some other articles of kitchen furniture, which she brings with her. The husband, as master of the family, considers himself bound to support it by his bodily exertions, as hunting, trapping, &c.; the woman, as his help mate, takes upon herself the labors of the field, and is far from considering them as more important than those to which her husband is subjected, being well satisfied that with his guns and traps he can maintain a family in any place where game is to be found: nor do they think it any hardship imposed upon them; for they themselves say, that while their field labor employs them at most six weeks in the year, that of the men continues the whole year round." (IN VIII:195-197)

Charlevoix's *Description de la Nouvelle France*: "In some places the young man 'seats himself by the side of the girl in her own cabin, which if she suffers without stirring from her place, she is held as consenting, and the marriage is concluded.'" (IN II:6)

*Town Histories in Concord Library*: "Indians professed Christianity. Formerly practised polygamy." (IN I:13)

Samuel de Champlain: "The women separate from their husbands & families during their monthly courses—retire into little houses apart." (IN II:42)

Lescarbot's *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*:

The Canadians respect marriage but the men have two or three wives—these do not marry again on the death of their husband. Polygamy practiced everywhere. Father did not marry with daughter. Mother with son—nor brother with sister. Widows married again at Port Royal. (IN III:56)

After a birth the wives dwell apart from their husbands 30 or 40 days. (IN III:61)

Van der Donck's *Description of New Netherlands*:

"No Indian will keep his wife, however much he loved her, when he knows she is unchaste."

Generally have but one wife—but chiefs frequently 2, 3 or 4.

"Prostitution is considered worse by day than by night, and in the open fields than elsewhere, as it may be seen."

But the young unmarried women are very free and do as they please and the offspring of their singular connexions has as much respect as any.

“Those women are proud of such conduct, and when they become old they will frequently boast of their connexion with many of their chiefs and great men.” (IN IV:48)

“When they suckle or are pregnant, they in those cases practise the strictest abstinence, because as they say, it is beneficial to their offspring, and to nursing children—they observe the former custom so religiously, that they hold it to be disgraceful for a woman to recede from it before her child is weaned, which they usually do when their children are a year old, and those who wean their children before that period are despised.” (IN IV:49)

## MANUFACTURERS

Charlevoix’s *Description de la Nouvelle France*: “The northern Ind. used wooden kettles—and put in hot stones to make the water boil.” (IN II:11)

Hutchinson’s *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*: “The Narragansetts ‘supplied the other nations with money, pendants & bracelets; also with tobacco, pipes of stone, some blue & some white; they furnished the earthen vessels and pots for cooking and other domestic uses.’” (IN I:30-31)

Edwards’ *A Campaign in New Mexico*:

At Santa Fe they grind their corn with two stones — “the largest,” he says, “generally about two feet by one foot and a few inches thick, is



hewn out of the hard boulders which abound in this country and are cut so that, by means of two legs, they rest on the ground at an angle of 35°, while the meal is ground with the end of the second stone, which is small and narrow, and only as long as the other stone is wide." (IN II:32)

*Gookin's Indians in New England:*

"but now they generally get kettles of brass, copper, or iron, these they find more lasting than those made of clay, which were subject to be broken; and the clay or earth they were made of was very scarce and dear." (IN II:44-45)

"Some of their baskets are made of rushes; some of brush; others of maise husks; others of a kind of silk grass; others of a kind of wild hemp; and some of barks of trees." (IN II:45).

Ephraim Squier's *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley* (1848) contains extensive commentary on the character of ancient earth-works, the structure, contents and purposes of the mounds (burial, sacrifice and observation), and intricate maps of the various mounds of two hundred feet to the inch. Squier makes two interesting assumptions: prehistoric mound culture relics bear a striking resemblance to Egyptian cartouches, and this culture moved south to Mexico where it burgeoned into Mayan culture. Thoreau was particularly interested in Squier's descriptions of pottery: "The western Ind. mixed 'pounded shells; quartz and sometimes

simple coarse sand' with the clay to make it resist the action of fire. Those in the mounds equal & resemble the Peruvian." (IN II:53-54)

Lescarbot's *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*: "Maple; of the ashes of this tree the Indians make a dye, with which they force out oyl from oak akorns that is highly esteemed by the Indians." (IN III:69)

From a work by General Charles Bent of New Mexico Thoreau notes that "The Apaches or Jicarillas "only attempt at manufacture is "a species" of potter's ware, capable of tolerable resistance to fire, and much used by them & the Mexicans for culinary purposes. This they barter with the Mexicans &c.'" (IN V:91)

## EDUCATION

The following extract from Heckewelder's *History of the Indian Nations* bears a remarkable similarity to Thoreau's own views on the education of children:

First teach them the existence of "a great, good & benevolent spirit." — "That he has given them a fertile extensive country well stocked with game of every kind for their subsistence, and that by one of his inferior spirits he has also sent down to them from above corn, pumpkins, squashes, beans, and other vegetables for their nourishment."

Tell them that they were made the superior of all other creatures & excite their ambition to become distinguished hunters

trappers or warriors—and “by submitting to the counsels of the aged & the chiefs to become ‘Wisemen.’ They tell them that there are good actions & bad actions—&c. &c. &c. The whole community help teach . . . by precept & example. Nor is the parents’ authority ever supported by harsh or compulsive means; no whip, no punishment, no threats are ever used to enforce commands or compel obedience. The child’s pride is the feeling to which an appeal is made,” — “This method of conveying instruction is, I believe, common to most Indian nations; and lays the foundation for that voluntary submission to their Chiefs, for which they are so remarkable.” (IN VIII:178-180)

In William Bartram’s *Travels through North and South Carolina . . . Together with Observations on the Manners of the Indians* (1791) Thoreau found unexcelled descriptions of the wilderness of the American Southeast, of its vegetation, bird life and other wild animals. He gained particular insight into the customs, beliefs and manners of the Cherokee tribe:

“The youth under the supervision of some of their ancient people, are daily stationed in the fields, and are continually whooping and hallooing, to chase away crows, jackdaws, blackbirds, and such predatory animals; and the lads are armed with bows & arrows, and being trained up to it from their early youth, are sure of a mark, and in the course of the day load themselves with squirrels, birds, etc. The men in turn patrol the corn fields at night, to protect their

provisions from the depredations of night. . . as bears, raccoons, and deer." (IN III:102-103)

## DRESS

### *Jesuit Relations:*

"They make shoes of elk (élan) skins to use on these rackets.<sup>33</sup> They have not the art of hardening or tanning leather, and indeed they have no need of it. In the summer they go bare foot, in the winter it is necessary that their shoes be of a supple skin, otherwise they would injure their rackets." (IN V:147)

Heckewelder's *History of the Indian Nations*: "Dress anciently of skins & feathers — 'Their clothing, they say, was not only warmer, but lasted much longer than any woolen goods they have once purchased of the white people.'" (IN VIII:242)

Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyage from Montreal* (London, 1802) contains a general description of the fur trade of the Northwest, the geography, climate, flora and fauna of arctic Canada as well as three-way dictionaries from English to Knisteneaux to Algonquin showing a linguistic similarity. Mackenzie gave Thoreau much information on Indian customs and dress:

---

<sup>33</sup> Snowshoes.

“The female dress is formed of the same materials as those of the men are, but of a different make in arrangement. Their shoes are commonly plain, and their leggins fastened beneath the knee. The coat & body covering falls down to the middle of their leg, and is fastened over their shoulders with cords, a flap or cape turning down about 8 inches, both before & behind, and agreeably ornamented with quill work and fringe.” (IN XI:97)

*Massachusetts Historical Collections:*

*Gosnold's Voyage* (1602): “It is said the natives had plates of copper hanging from their ears. Tobacco pipes ‘decked with copper’ and one had hanging from his neck a breast plate of copper a foot long and half a foot broad. Another his head stuck with feathers like a turkey-cock’s train.” (IN I:5)

*Weymouth's Voyage to the Penobscot* (1605): “Bodies painted black faces—some red—some black—some blue—beaver or deer skins cast over them like a mantle and hanging down to their knees made fast together upon the shoulders with leather: some had sleeves, most had none.” (IN I: 9)

*Charlevoix's Description de la Nouvelle France*: “They wear on their feet a sort of socks, made of deers skin dried in the smoke; their hose are also of skins or pieces of stuff wrapped round the leg.” (IN II:10)

Hutchinson's *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*: "Creased their skin<sup>34</sup> by scraping & scrubbing, some times stained or colored them with odd sort of embroideries." (IN I:36)

Daniel Gookin: "Clothing was made of the skins of "deer, moose, beaver, otters, rackoons, foxes etc." (IN II:46)

Samuel de Champlain: "The Canadians use the procupine quills about their dress. They paint & grease their faces with flower, oil and other fat." (IN III:45)

Richardson's *Arctic Searching Expedition on the Eskimos*:

"I have been told that when the family alone are present, the several members of it sit partly or even wholly naked." (IN V:5)

"The Eskimo boots are peculiar to the nation, being made of seal skin so closely sewed as to be water-tight, and coming up to the hips like those used by fishermen in our own land." (IN V:7)

Lt. Sherard Osborn's *Stray Leaves from an Arctic Journal* (1852) along with Richardson and Kane gave Thoreau vivid details of the lonely arctic landscapes with the isolated polar cultures of Eskimo colonies. Thoreau writes, "in the extreme N. of Baffin's Bay isolated from the rest of the world he<sup>35</sup> says":

---

<sup>34</sup> Animal hide.

<sup>35</sup> Osborn.

“Their clothing consisted of a dressed sealskin sack, with a hood which served for a cap when it was too cold to trust to a thick head of jet-black hair for warmth.” (IN V:58)

## PAINTING

*Adair’s The History of American Indians:*

“The Ind. are of a copper or red-clay color — and they delight in everything which they imagine may promote & increase it” as vermillion. (IN IX:34)

“The parching winds, and hot sun-beams, heating upon their naked bodies, in their various gradations of life, necessarily tarnish their skins with the . . . red color. Add to this, their constant anointing themselves with bean’s oil, or grease, mixed with a certain red root, which by a peculiar property, is able alone, in a few years time, to produce the Indian color in those who are born white, and who have been advanced to maturity. These metamorphoes I have often seen.” (IN IX:35)

*Jesuit Relations* (1664-65): “The savages paint themselves of all colors when they go to war ‘but particularly black.’” (IN X:6)

*Charlevoix’s Description de la Nouvelle France:* “Ind. painted themselves all over. They [used] charcoal.” (IN II:10)

While Thoreau criticized Capt. Jonathan Carver's *Three Years Travels through the Interior Parts of North America* (1797) for "no information respecting the intermediate country, nor much I fear about the country beyond" (Journal, IV, 97), he did cull considerable information on western American Indian beliefs and practices. Carver describes in some detail the attacks and plunderings of western Indian tribes, as well as the sincerity of their religious beliefs. Thoreau extracted the following note on Indian painting:

"They (Ind. of the N.W.) draw with a piece of burnt coal, taken from the hearth, upon the inside of the birch tree; which is as smooth as paper, and answers the same purposes, not withstanding it is a yellow cast." (IN V:27)

## **MONEY**

Gookin's *Indians in New England*:

"Wompampague," says Gookin "is made artificially, of a part of the Welk's shell, the black is of double the value of the white. It is made principally, by the Narragansetts Block Islands (Block-Islanders) and Long Island Indians, upon the sandy flats & shores of those coasts the welk shells are found." (IN I:21)



## NAMING

Heckewelder's *History of the Indian Nations*:

"The name they had for the place where Philadelphia now stands,—is kúegrienáka—the grove of the long pine trees." pronounced *koo-ek-wen-aw-koo*. Wm Penn is trans. "by Miquon, which means a feather or quill. The Iroquois called him Onas"—with the same meaning.

"The first name given by the Indians to the Europeans who landed in Virginia was Wapsid Lenape (White people;) when, however, afterwards they began to commit murders on the red men, whom they pierced with swords, they gave to the Virginians the name *Mechanschicau* (long knives,) to distinguish them from others of the same color.

"They never apply it<sup>36</sup> to the Quakers"—They call them Quakers, not having in their language the sound to express your letter R." (IN VIII:190-191)

From Weymouth Thoreau quotes, "They have names for many stars." (IN I, 11)

Ephraim Squier:

"The Aurora Borealis is 'The dance of the dead' in which only the spirits of great warriors & mighty medicine men can participate.

---

<sup>36</sup> Murderer.

‘The Chipeways are said to call this phenomenon ‘the dancing spirit.’ The ‘Milky Way’ was called the ‘Bath of Souls’ leading to the spirit land.” (IN III: 89)

Some of this evidence would seem to disprove Stith Thompson’s twentieth-century contention that “We have no assurance, nor does it even seem likely, that most primitive peoples really concern themselves much with heavenly bodies” (The Folktale [New York, 1946], p. 384).

From Schoolcraft’s *History of the Indian Tribes of the United States* concerning the Dakota calendar:

“The Dacotas count time by moons—Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, which is counted one year. Twenty-eight days or nights are counted one moon. They can tell, pretty well, about what time the new moon will appear. 3 months or moons to each season. January, the severe or hard moon, February, the moon in which raccoons run, March the moon of sore eyes, April, the moon that the geese lay, May, the moon of planting, June, the moon for strawberries and hoeing corn, July, mid-summer, August, the moon that corn is gathered, September, the moon that they make wild rice, October & November, running of the does, December, the moon when the deer shed their horns.” (IN VI:144)

Thoreau paraphrases from Carver’s *Three Years Travels through the Interior Parts of North America*:

April the month of plants—May of Flowers—June the Hot moon—July the Buck moon—August the Sturgeon moon—September the Corn Moon, (leave their villages & travel toward their winter hunting grounds) November the Beaver moon. (beavers retire to their houses). December the Hunting moon—January the Cold moon. Know the pole star—Reckon distances by days journeys—which are about 20 miles. (IN V:31)

*Jesuit Relations of 1536:* “They say—the star falls, when they see some one who is fat & en bon point for they hold that a certain day a star fell from heaven in the form of a fat goose (oye).” (IN VI:96-97)

Le Jenne of the Jesuit Relations: “Think that the souls of the dead go to the presence of God by “way of the stars, which they call. . . the way of souls, which we call the milky way.” (IN VIII:39)

## GOVERNMENT

*Schoolcraft History of the Indian Tribes of the United States:*

“Respect for age the germ of their government. Councils of old men sometimes in the case of distinguished individuals the office of councillor or ogima (in Algonquin) becomes hereditary.”

On the other hand “daring & resolute men” from among the young men & warriors will be recognized as chiefs. But the chief does not settle any internal question. It is a government of chiefs &

councils. Measures<sup>37</sup> Things are carried not by vote but by acclamation. (IN V:80-81)

Heckewelder's *History of the Indian Nations*:

"Their chiefs find little or no difficulty in governing them. They are supported by able and experienced counsellors."

"Between the years 1770 & 1780, they could relate very minutely what had passed between Wm Penn and their forefathers, at their first meeting & afterwards, and also the transactions which took place with the governors who succeeded him. For the purpose of respecting their own memories, and of instructing one or more of their most capable & promising young men in these matters, they assemble once or twice a year. On these occasions they always meet at a chosen spot in the woods, at a small distance from the town, where a fire is kindled, & at the proper time provisions are brought out to them: there, on a large piece of bark, or on a blanket, all the documents are laid out in such order, that they can at once distinguish each particular speech, the same as we know the principal contents of an instrument of writing by the endorsement on it. Many papers & parchment writings are connected with the belts, or strings of wampum, they apply to some trusty white man (If such can be had) to read the contents on them. Their speaker then, who is always chosen from among those who are endowed with superior talents, and has already been trained up to the

---

<sup>37</sup> *Measures* is written above the word *Things*.

business, rises, & in an audible voice delivers, with gravity that the subject requires, the contents, sentence and sentence, until he has finished the whole on one subject. On the manner in which the belts or strings of wampum are handled by the speaker, much depends; the *turning* of the belt which takes place when he has finished one half of his speech, is a material point though this is not common in all speeches with belts; but when it is the case, and is done properly, it may be as well known by it how far the speaker has advanced in his speech” ec.—“and a good speaker will be able to point out the exact place on a belt which is to answer to each particular sentence,”—The belts & strings are finally put up “carefully in the speech bag or pouch.” (IN VIII, 172-174)

### TREATMENT OF CAPTIVES

*Heckewelder's History of the Indian Nations:*

Scalping.

Leave only a tuft of hair on the crown for no other reason “than to enable themselves to take off each other’s scalp in war with greater facility.” (IN VIII:241)

As to treatment of prisoners “I may be permitted to say, that those dreadful executions are by no means so frequent as is commonly imagined. The prisoners are generally adopted—except when a nation has suffered great losses in war, it is thought necessary to revenge the death of their warriors—” not after a

successful war unattended with acts of cruelty on the part of the enemy. (IN VIII:244)

Samuel Morton on the Miamis:

“Revenge was remarkable even among Indians; and. . . that the Miamis and Kickapoos once embraced a society of men whose office it was to appease the spirit of revenge, whether national or individual, by devouring prisoners taken in war.” (IN IV:46)

Thoreau received a clear and objective picture of the missionary process through Father Pierre Jean de Smet’s *Oregon Missions and Travels* (1847). De Smet’s role of peacemaker between the whites and the Indians and his many unbiased observations on Northwestern Indian tribal customs as well as his rich descriptions of the Oregon wilderness gained Thoreau’s attention: “Indians of Oregon have slaves—make wars. Obtain them. Commonly they are the children of prisoners—sometimes the prisoners.” (N II, 33)

*Jesuit Relations* of 1634:

“Some Iroquois prisoners singing always ended with oh! oh! oh! ah! ah! hem! hem! hem!—They first pull the nails out of their prisoners fingers. Saw where one had bitten a mouthful out of his prisoner’s arm & had also bitten off a finger. Finally they devour them—” This at Tadoussac. (IN VI:4)

These notes may have inspired Thoreau's statement that "I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized." (*Walden* pp. 207-208)

## MARINERS

Elisha K. Kane's *Arctic Exploration* is a book which Thoreau liked and used considerably. This handsomely illustrated work (published in two volumes in Philadelphia, 1856) has many vivid passages depicting arctic ice floes, glaciers, red snow, frozen landscapes and midnight sun, as well as discussions of Eskimo modes of boating in this forbidding country. He copied many intricate sketches of Eskimo kyacks and paddles in Volume VII of the Notebooks, such as the following one:



(IN VII, 299)

From Champlain Thoreau obtains evidence that the "Canadian Indians must have been decent mariners since—Newfoundland was not inhabited—Savages went there from the mainland in summer to see the vessels which came to fish for Cod" (IN III, 47).

## WOODCRAFT

Hutchinson's *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*:

"I have seen a Native go into the woods with his hatchet, carrying only a basket of corn with him, and stones to strike fire. When he had felled his tree (being a chestnut) he made him a little house or shed of the bark of it; he [makes] fire. . . his corn he boils, and hath the brook by him, and sometimes angles for a little fish. . . within ten or twelve days. . . finished his boat; with which afterwards he ventures out to fish the ocean." (IN I:37)

As Thoreau copied this down, I cannot help thinking he must have had in mind his own Walden experience of building a shed in the woods and of living in nature.

Peter Kalm's *Travels into North America*:

"They employ tree-mushrooms very frequently instead of tinder. Those which are taken from the sugar-maple are reckoned the best; those of the red maple are next in goodness; and next to them, those of the sugar birch. For want of these, they likewise make use of those which grow on the asp-tree or tremble<sup>38</sup>." (IN IV:3)

---

<sup>38</sup> French for *aspen*.



## HUNTING

Heckewelder's *History of the Indian Nations*: "The hunter prefers going out with his gun on an empty stomach; he says that hunger stimulates him to exertion." (IN VIII:234)

Charlevoix's *Description de la Nouvelle France*:

They cut holes in the ice and knocked the beavers on the head when they came for fresh air. They spread nets under the ice below the dams and drive the beavers into them. "The Indians take great care to tender their dogs from touching the bones of the beaver, they being so very hard as to break their teeth." (IN II:1)

*Massachusetts Historical Collections*: "These (cormorants) they take in the night time, when they are asleep on rocks off at sea." (IN I:57)

Thoreau notes that Charles Darwin says of certain Indians on the Colorado in Buenos Ayres: "One of their chief indoor occupations is to knock two stones together till they become round in order to make the bolas. It is the labor of two days." (IN III:88)

Van der Donck's *Description of New Netherlands* (1656):

"The Indians take many<sup>39</sup> in snares, when the weather changes in winter. Then they lay bulbous roots, which the turkeys are fond of, in the small rills and streams of water, which the birds take up, when they are ensnared and held—" (IN IV:41)

Schoolcraft's *History of the Indian Tribes of the United States*: "An arrow from the bow of a Pawnee or Cheyenne has been known to pass through the body of a buffalo. Its force upon the human frame is prodigious." (IN V:73)

*Jesuit Relations*: "Their famines result commonly from the want of snow & hence of moose in the winter—and are extremely common." (IN VI:57)

## FISHING

Theodat's *Le Grand Voyage du Pays de Hurons*:

"The great fish which they call assihendo which is a fish as large as the largest cod. . . but much better—to see this fishing he. . . went to an island near the north side where many savages collected for the same purpose."

"Every evening they carried their nets about half a league or a league out into the lake, and in the morning at day break they went to raise them and brought back always a quantity of good great fish,

---

<sup>39</sup> Turkeys.

such as assihendos, trout, sturgeons, and others, which they gutted & opened.” (IN VIII:36)

William Hubbard: “When particular fish came on the coast or up the rivers they were there. Sometimes they made all common that they caught. The tribe on the coast entertained the tribes from the country & vice versa.” (IN I:16)

Samuel de Champlain: The Canadian Indians—plant about 10 kernels of corn together. They caught fish in nets attached on pole under the ice. Fastening little stones to the bottom to keep it down. (IN III:45)

### **SUPERSTITIONS AND RELIGIONS**

As with tradition & history, this category appears to have been one of Thoreau’s major interests in Indian cultures. He shows his entire sympathy with polytheistic Indian culture in his journal:

“If he who makes two blades of grass grow where one grew before is a benefactor, he who discovers two gods where there was only known the one (and such a one!) before is a still greater benefactor. I would fain improve every opportunity to wonder and worship, as a sunflower welcomes the light. The more thrilling, wonderful, divine objects I behold in a day, the more expanded and immortal I become. If a stone appeals to me and elevates me, tells me how many miles I have come, how many remain to travel, and the more the better, — reveals the future to me in some measure, it is a matter

of private rejoicing. If it did the same service to all, it might well be a matter of public rejoicing." (*Journal IX*, 45-46)

Thoreau certainly considered Indian beliefs rooted in the mystical depths of nature, a much-needed source of renewal for the "civilized" man. From Hutchison's *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay* Thoreau extracts the following information on Passaconaway which he later used in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.

"Indian Notebook"

"God was Ketan—gave man fair weather. Powows cured sickness—Passaconaway made them believe that he could make water burn, rocks move, and trees dance, and metamorphose himself into a flaming man; that in winter he could raise a green leaf out of the ashes of a dying one, and produce a living snake from the skin of a dead one." (IN I:40)

*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers:*

In these parts dwelt the famous Sachem Passaconaway, who was seen by Gookin at Pawtucket, when he was about one hundred and twenty years old." He was reported a wise man and a pow-wow, and restrained his people from going to war with the English. They believed "that he could make water burn, rocks move, and trees dance, and metamorphose himself into a flaming man; that in winter he could raise a green leaf out of the ashes of a dry one, and produce

a living snake from the skin of a dead one, and many similar miracles." (*A Week* 332)

This would indicate that the "Indian Notebooks" were begun as early as 1847 or earlier because most of *A Week* was composed at Walden Pond between 1845 and 1847.

Also from Hutchinson's *History*:

"According to some converts<sup>40</sup>—When an Ind. has a strange dream in which he sees Chapian (evil spirit) as a serpent—he receives a powwow with great dancing & rejoicing of the Ind." (IN I:40)

"Little religion—hereafter fruitful cornfields—flowering meads—pleasant to swim & bathe in. Hunting—fowling;—fishing."

"Heaven is the west wind—that wind bringing pleasant weather." (IN I:43)

"They had gods East West North & South—there was a god over their corn, another over their beans, another over their pumpkins, & squashes, & c. There was one god over their . . . wigwams, another of the fire, another over the sea, another of the wind, one of the day and another of the night; and there were four gods over the four parts of the years & etc. But there was also one great God & one great evil one." (IN I:53)

---

<sup>40</sup> Indian converts.

"I once travelled to an island of the wildest in our forests, where, in the night, an Ind . . . . said he had a vision or dream of the sun, whom they worship for a god, darting a beam into his breast; which he conceived to be the warning of his death." He was greatly troubled and kept him waking and fasting for 10 days. (IN I:57)

*Massachusetts Historical Collections:*

"They have given me the names of 37 gods."

"When I have argued with them about their fire-god, 'Can it,' say they, 'be but this fire must be a God, or divine power, that out of a storm will arise a spark, and when a poor naked Ind. is ready to starve with cold in the house, and especially in the woods, often saves his life, doth warm all over food for us, and if it be angry will burn thy house about us, yea if a spark fall into the dry wood, burns up the country?'" (IN I:68)

"They have a sacrifice rock, as it is termed, between Plymouth & Sandwich, to which stones & sticks are always cast by Ind. who pass it."

The Indians he says "had an idea of a future state of rewards & punishments, where the persons who had committed certain vices, cowardice & suicide especially, would sink into a dark gulf, over which all were & walk in a small hole." (IN I:77)

Charlevoix's *Description de la Nouvelle France*:

"According to the Iroquois, every disease is a desire of the soul, and people die only because their desire has not been satisfied." (IN II:15)

"The Carolina Indians, pointing westward said, "where the sun sleeps, our fathers came thence." (IN II:36)

"Woonand or Mannitt the good God: Mattand the evil one." (IN II:47)

Alexander Young's *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers*, like Hutchinson's *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*, gave Thoreau valuable firsthand information on the founding and settling of the Bay Colony. Young bases his study in part on his rediscovery of the manuscript of William Bradford's *History of the People and Colony in the First Church at Plymouth*. Thoreau was particularly interested in accounts of the pilgrims' contacts with such Indian leaders as Massasoit, Nauset and Namaschet. He jotted down information on the Indian god Kiehtan:

"One whom they call *Kiehtan*, to be the principal and maker of all the rest. At first, they say, there was no sachem or king, but Kiehtan, who dwelleth above in the heavens. His habitation was far westward in the heavens, they say; Thither the bad men go also, and knock at his door, but he bids them *quatchet* that is to say walk abroad, for there is no place for such; so that they wander in restless

want . . . Never man saw this Kiehtan; only old men tell them of him, and bid them tell their children ——. Another power they worship whom they call Hobbanock—this, as far as we can conceive, is ‘the devil.’ Many sacrifices the Indians use, and in some cases kill children.” (IN III:81 )

Adriaen Van der Donck: “Their opinion of the creation & God—exists in heaven, but not alone . . . for he has there with him a goddess, a female person, the most beautiful ever known.” (IN IV:54)

Charlevoix’s *Description de la Nouvelle France*: “The Huron King of heaven kicked down one of his wives from heaven onto the back of a tortoise who with his paws discovered the earth.” (IN IV:117) Thoreau must have been struck by the similarity of this Huron myth to the Hindu tortoise myth alluded to in “Walking.” In a later volume Thoreau notes that the mythology of Asia is “evident in various forms from one end of America to another.” (IN IX:131)

*Jesuit Relations* of 1634:

“Their religion, or rather superstition, consists encore a prier; but O my God! What prayers they make! In the morning the little children going out of the cabin cry out à pleine teste, cacouakhi, Pakhais, Arniscouakhi, Pakhais Mousouakhi; Pakhais: Come Porcupines, come heavens, come stags.” (IN V:5)



“They say that the soul goes by the chimney,—they strike with a stick on their cabins, in order that the soul may not linger, and accost some child, for it would be the death of it.”

Dogs are not fed beaver bones as “They think the spirit of he beaver, seeing how their bones are treated, will warn the other beavers of it.” (IN VI:5-6)

*Jesuit Relations* of 1536: “They think also that beaver is angry when some one is drowned or dies of cold.” (IN VI:101)

From Le Jeune of the *Jesuit Relations* Thoreau notes that Hurons “believe in dif. spirits presiding over dif. places—as over particular rocks in only the river—to which they offer tobacco.” (IN VIII:38)

*Jesuit Relations* of 1645-46: “They<sup>41</sup> say that the winds are produced by 7 other genii who dwell in the air beneath the heavens, & blow the 7 winds which reign in these countries.” (IN IX: 511-512)

*Jesuit Relations* of 1666-67:

Near Sault in Great Lake district Jesuits were with Iroquois who stopped to collect flint stones along a shore—“our Iroquois have told us that they never fail to stop at this place to render homage to a nation of invisible men, who dwell there, at the bottom of the water and occupy themselves in preparing flints,” to whom they must offer tobacco. (IN X:97)

---

<sup>41</sup> Algonquins.

John Brand's *Observations on Popular Antiquities of Great Britain* (which Thoreau simply calls Brand's *Popular Antiquities*) illustrated for Thoreau that ancient European folklore was not unlike the primal folklore of the American Indian. Brand's three-volume study describes the sorcery, omens, charms, funeral customs and the like of the British Isles. From the first volume he quotes: "What the peasants in Ireland call an elf-arrow, is frequently set in silver, and worn about the neck as an amulet against being elf-shot. There are the small arrow heads employed by the aboriginal Irish." (IN XI:224)

David Crantz's *History of Greenland* (1767) was another source that Thoreau quotes in his "Indian Notebooks" which in turn he condensed and employed in his Journal. While Crantz is largely concerned with the "Brethren's society for the furthering of the Gospel among the heathen," he says much about Eskimo religious concepts:

Greenlanders have no organized religious concepts of Creation—when asked who created earth sky & waters they answer either that they know not or things have always been as they are. But they do have their elysium where Toringarsuk & his mother dwell in the bowels of the earth in a state of perpetual paradise where there is no night & abundance of game & fish and no real toil on part of these 2 creatures. (IN XI:328)

"They say, that in distant future periods, when all mankind shall have died & be extinct, the terrestrial globe shall be smashed to pieces, & purified from the blood of the dead by a vast flood of water. Then a wind shall blow the clean-washed dust together, &

replace it in a more beautiful form than ever. From that time there will be no more lone & barren rocks, but the whole will be a level champaign, overspread with verdure & delight. The animals will also rise to be reincarnated in vast abundance. But as for man, Pirksoma i.e. He that is above, will breathe upon them, they shall live." (IN XI:330-331)

It is probable that this last sentence about Pirksoma is a source for his *Journal* entry of December 4, 1860: "The Greenlander's Pirksoma (he that is above), or any the like, is always the name of a false god to them." This *Journal* passage would have been written about the same time he completed Volume XI of the "Indian Notebooks."

Weymouth's Voyage to the Penobscot (1605) in the *Massachusetts Historical Collections*:

Religious ceremony consisting of shouting-stamping with sticks and stones and thrusting fire brands into the earth-for 2 hours in the night. . . . A tobacco pipe—" the short claw of a lobster," — this signified that the tobacco was growing "but a foot above ground" (IN I:11)

*Massachusetts Historical Collections*: At a "kind of solemn public meeting they lie under the trees, in a kind of religious observation, and have a mixture of devotion & sport." (IN I:67)

Charlevoix's *Description de la Nouvelle France*: In an eclipse. . . the Hurons think the moon is sick-make a noise and beat their dogs." (IN IV:123)

Carver's *Three Years Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America*: "They pay a great regard to the first appearance of evening moon, and on the occasion always repeat some joyful sounds, stretching the same time their hands towards it." (IN V:30)

*Jesuit Relations* of 1634:

They told him "the Moon was eclipsed or appeared black, because she held her son in her arms—The sun is her husband who marches all day, & she all night, and if he is eclipsed or obscured, it is because he also sometimes takes the son which he has had by the moon in his arms. They think that he (the son) comes sometimes on earth, and when he walks in their country, they die in great numbers." (IN VI:10)

## MEDICINE

Heckewelder's *History of the Indian Nations*:

"They make considerable use of the barks of trees such as the white & black oak, the white walnut of which they make pills, the cherry, dogwood, maple, birch, and several others." Their mode of preparing & compounding these medicines a profound secret.

“Are too apt to attribute the most natural death to the arts & incantations of sorcerers, and their medicine is, in most cases, as much directed against those as against the disease itself.”

But there are some “practitioners among them who are free from these prejudices, or at least do not introduce them into their practice”—

“Still there is a superstitious notion, in which all their physicians participate, which is that when a emetic is to be administered, the water in which the potion is mixed must be drawn up a stream, and if for a cathartic downwards.” (IN VIII:247-248)

Hutchinson’s *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay* on Medicine man cures: “When the powow was sent for. . . after a hideous bellowing & groaning, he made it stop. . . and then the powow renewed his moaning, smiting his naked breast & thighs, and jumping about until he foamed at the mouth.” Thoreau comments that “*this worked upon the imagination.*” See Thoreau’s “Fragmentary Essay” at the beginning of this edition. “They<sup>42</sup> pulled out the sickness by applying hands to the sick person, and so blew it<sup>43</sup> away.” (IN I:40)

---

<sup>42</sup> Powwows.

<sup>43</sup> Sickness.

## WAR

*Schoolcraft's History of the Indian Tribes of the United States:*

"Algonquin tradition affirms that in ancient times they constructed a very formidable instrument of attack, by sewing up a large round boulder in a new skin. To this a long handle was tied. When the skin dried it became very tight around the stone; and after being painted with devices, assumed the appearance & character of a solid globe upon a pole. This formidable instrument, to which the name of habits may be applied, is figured from the description of an Algonquin chief. . . plunged upon a boat or canoe it was capable of sinking it. Brought down among a group of men on a sudden, it produced consternation and death." (IN V:76)

*Heckewelder's History of the Indian Nations:*

"On drawing near to an enemy's country, they endeavor as much as possible to conceal their tracks; some times they scatter themselves, marching at proper distances from each other for a whole day & more, meeting, however, again at night, when they keep a watch; at other times they march in what is called Indian file, one man behind the other, treading carefully in each other's steps, so that their number may not be ascertained by the prints of the feet. The nearer they suppose themselves to be to the enemy, the more attentive they are to choosing hard, stony and rocky ground, on which human footsteps leave no impression; soft, marshy and grassy soils are

particularly avoided" —since they show prints of the feet & trodden grass.

"In some instances they deceive their enemies by imitating the cries or calls of some animals such as the . . . turkey." (IN VIII:212)

From Jacques Cartier Thoreau notes that the Canadian Indians "abbatre great trees to barricade themselves." (IN III:40)

When Thoreau visited Canada and climbed Montreal's Mount Royal, he relived the legendary adventures of Cartier as described in "A Yankee in Canada": "We, too, climbed the hill which Cartier, first of white men, ascended, and named Mont-real. . . and, like him, 'we saw the said river as far as we could see, grand, large, et spacieux, going to the southwest.' " (*Excursions and Poems* [Boston, 1893], pp. 98-99)

From Charlevoix's *Description de la Nouvelle France* Thoreau records that the Canadian Indians "Paint to terrify the enemy & to hide their own fear. The young warriors paint to hide their youth. . . . Their colors are obtained from earth & the bark of trees." (IN II:10)

Hutchinson's *History of the Colony of Massachusetts*: Mohawks had armor of sea horse skins, principle weapon the tomahawk, "a club two and a third feet long with a knob at the end." (IN I:33)

Gookin's *Indians in New England*: "Their weapons . . . were bows and arrows, clubs, and tomahawks, made of wood like a pole axe, with a

sharpened stone fastened therein; and for defence, they had targets made of barks of trees.” (IN II:47)

Van der Donck’s *Description of New Netherlands*: “Their weapons formerly were bows and arrows, with a war-club hung to the arm, and a square shield which covered the body up to the shoulders; their faces they disfigure in such a manner that it is difficult to recognize one known before.” (IN IV:52)

Richardson’s *Arctic Searching Expedition*: The Eskimo’s “personal bravery is conspicuous, and they are the only native nation on the North American continent who oppose their enemies face to face in open fight.” (IN V:5)

## LANGUAGE

Adair’s *The History of the American Indian*: “The Ind. Y-O-He-Wah” seems to be the true Hebrew pronunciation of the divine essential name, יהוה | Jehovah,” —that the Ind. “continue to repeat the favorite name of God ac. to the ancient pronunciation”!!! (IN IX:43)

Schoolcraft’s *History of the Indian Tribes of the United States*:

## IN OBJIBWAI

mang—loon

kag—porcupine

Pizhiki—a bison

Ogima—a chief

Muskodai—prairie

Kon—snow



Akkik—kettle

Omimi—pigeon

Nigik—otter

Mushkos—elk

Wakyigun—house

Wazhusk—muskrat

Ninkwah—bear

Pinai—partridge

Moz—Moose

Ohkodai—fire

Chiman—canoe

Gizhig—sky

Opin—potatoes

Addik—reindeer

Wabos—hare

Annimoosh—dog

(IN V:132)

One can see why Thoreau made it his business to learn Penobscot when he explored Maine with Joe Polis and Joe Aitteon as recorded in *The Maine Woods*.

*A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner* (New York, 1830):

## OBJIBIWAI

Metik-goag—trees

Shingo-beek—Ever greens, or cone bearing trees

Netish-un—trees with broad leaves

Nin-au-tik—Sugarmaple (our own tree)

Ne-be-min-ah-ga-wunic—high cranberry bush

Wis-seg-ge-bug—Bitterleaf

Munino-mun-ne-chee-heeg—Red panit root

Meen—Blueberry

Weah-gush-koan—dust; or that which is mixed together

O-kun-dum-moge—Pond lillies  
 Nah-nom-o-ne-gah-wah-zheen—wild rice  
 We-nis-se-bug-goon—Wintergreen  
 O-gris-e-maven—Squashes.—O-zaw-wave-o-gruis-se-maven—  
 yellow squash  
 Mis-kwo-de-se-min—Bean  
 As-ke-tum-moong—melons  
 Shah-ho-ze-gun—Milkweed  
 Wah-ko-nug—Lichens  
 O-zhush-kwa-to-wug—Fungi  
 Ah-wes-sic-ug—Animals (IN VI:356-360)

*Heckewelder's History of the Indian Nations:*

Between the Mississippi & the ocean eastward & the Hudson's Bay Company's possessions on the north—"There appears to be but 4 principal languages," some of their dialects "extend even beyond the Mississippi."

1st The Karabit — of the Greenlanders & Esquimaux. . .

2d The Iroquois "This language in various dialects is spoken by the. . . Six Nations. . . Hurons. . . and others."

3d The Lenape "This is the most widely extended of any of those that are spoken on this side of the Mississippi."

[4th] The Indians further N.W. Blackfeet &c. of whose language we cannot judge "from the scanty vocabularies which have been given by Mackenzie. . . and other travellers." (IN VIII:182)

Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal* (London, 1802):

[ENGLISH]	KNISTENEAUX	ALGONQUIN
Pole-cat	Shicak	Tibisca pesim
Elk	Moustache	Michai woi
Woolverine	Qui qua katch	Quin quoagki
Moose	Shi-kak	Monse
Dog	Mouswah	Ani-mouse
Snake	Atim	Ki nai bick
Comb	Kinibick	Pin ack wan
Net	Sicahoun	Assap
Tree	Athabe	Miti-coum
Wood	Mistick	Mitic
Fire	Mistick	Scou tay
Moon	Scou tay	Dibic Kijiss

(IN XI:107)

Thoreau makes the following comment on Indian languages following his notes from the *Jesuit Relations* of 1634:

The eloquent savage indulges in tropes & metaphors—he uses nature as a symbol . . . his metaphors are not farfetched—they are not concealed in the origin of language — but he translates entire phenomena into his speech. He looks around him in the woods . . . to aid his expression. His language though more flowery is less artificial. (IN VI:17)

This original comment of Thoreau seems to be related to two significant *Journal* entires which restate not only his assertions on the nature of the Indian language but also on the nature of his very own language: "Father Rasles' dictionary of the Abenaki language amounts to a very concentrated and trustworthy natural history of that people, though it was not completed. What they have a word for, they have a thing for." (*Journal* X:290) In the same volume of the *Journal* he writes, "My thought is a part of the meaning of the world, and hence I use a part of the world as a symbol to express my thought." (*Journal* X, 410).

Le Mercier of *Jesuit Relations* (1633): "We collect words from the mouth of the savages as so many precious stones." (IN VII:56)

The following extract from Noah Webster, though not on the Indians, relates to the Indians:

Ac. To N. Webster—the Greeks called "the primitive inhabitants of the West of Europe—Keltoc, kelts, Celts, a word signifying woodsmen. Welsh Celt, a cover or shelter, a *celt*; Celtiad, or inhabitant of the forest or wood; *celir* to conceal, Lat. *celo*. In Gaelic is *coilt* or *ceilt*. The Celts were originally a tribe or nation inhabiting the north of Italy."

Thoreau states, "This reminds me of the Adirondacks or Wood Eaters." (IN VIII:113)

Charlevoix's *Description de la Nouvelle France*:

"The beauty of their imagination equals its vivacity which appears in all their discourse. They are very quick at repartees, and their haranges . . . would have been applauded at Rome and Athens. Their eloquence has a strength, nature and pathos, which no art can give, and which the Greeks admired in the Barbarians." (IN II:7)

Levett's Voyage in 1623-24 in *Massachusetts Historical Collections*: Are slow of speech—Laugh at those who speak much, as fools. (IN I:12)

Charlevoix: "Never raise their voice to any considerable pitch, yet you perceive that they are affected with what they say, and they persuade." (IN II:8)

William Hubbard's *General History of New England* describes in detail the various territories of the New England Indian tribes with the mouth of the Charles River being the rendezvous point and great sachem of all of these tribes. Thoreau notes that the New England aboriginal languages "differ within 200 miles as much as English." (IN I:15)

Sebastien Rasles: "They have many guttural sounds which are only uttered with the throat, without making any movement with the lips." (IN II:20)

*Massachusetts Historical Collections*: In Nantucket "the boys, as soon as they can talk, will make use of the common phrases, as tounor[?], which is an Ind. word, and signifies that they have seen the whole twice." (IN I:48)

From Gookin Thoreau notes that “Our Ind. understand the lang. of the Canada Ind. And also of the Great Lake Ind. i.e. Massawomicks” (IN II, 48).

I think Josselyn’s description of Indian country in *New England Rarities* must have delighted Thoreau: “Rocky and Mountainous, and extremely overgrown with wood, yet here and there beautified with large rich Valleys, wherein are Lakes ten, twenty, yea sixty miles in Compas, out of which our great Rivers have their Beginnings.” His discussions of aborigines and, more specifically, the characteristics of aboriginal language were particularly apt for the “Indian Notebooks”: “the Indians of N.E. expressed different meanings by different gestures accompanying the same word—holding the head a[t] one side signified one thing—holding at their hand another.” (IN III:68)

Adriaen Van der Donck: Before learning their languages “we know no more of what they say than if a dog had barked. . . . They are not difficult, and the tribes can understand their dialects.” (IN IV:49-50)

Charlevoix’s *Description de la Nouvelle France concerning Algonquin and Huron languages*: “The greater part of the inhabitants of New England & Virginia speak dialects of it.” (IN IV:105)

Richardson’s *Arctic Searching Expeditions*: The Eskimo-language essentially one. R’s<sup>44</sup> interpreter from James Bay was understood on the icy sea 2500 miles dist[ance] by [native]. (IN V:4)

---

<sup>44</sup> Richardson’s.

Culbertson's *Expedition to the Upper Missouri*:

"The speeches were frequently interrupted by cries of "how, how," corresponding, I suppose to our "hear, hear," indicating approbation." (IN V:17)

"It is therefore the language of caution and defence hieroglyphs. These signs are beautiful and poetic; the rude figures which we see sometimes on buffalo robes are not mere awkward attempts at ornament but they are hieroglyphics, as easily read by an intelligent Indian as words by us, and perhaps containing a whole history of some great event." (IN V:21)

Carver's *Three Years Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America*:

"The Chipeway Tongue is the prevailing language throughout all the tribes, from the Mohawks of Canada, to those who inhabit the borders of the Mississippi, & from the Hurons & Illinois to such as dwell near Hudson's Bay." (IN V:26)

The whipporwill's note sounds to the Indians Muck-a-wiss — & that is his name. (IN V:34)

Thoreau notes that Morton "Thinks Ind. languages do not contain 'high refinement in forms of expression' though they may be "terse and beautiful' in their power of construction." (IN V:53)

Schoolcraft “calls the language of Eliot’s Bible ‘a well characterized dialect of the Algonquin—It constitutes a peculiar type of the Algonquin, which was spread along the Atlantic, and in the West.’ Thinks it ‘preceded any missionary effort of equal magnitude, in the way of translation, in India or any other part of the world.’” (IN V:97)

S[choolcraft] in his vocabulary made from Eliot’s Bible gives a word for melon *monaskootasquash*. Flower—rose & lily are translated by the same word *Peshaun*—owl is Kookookhan. (IN V:98)

Schoolcraft on pictographs and hieroglyphs:

“The subjects to which the N. Am. Ind. applies his pictographic skill, may be regarded as follows, namely:

1. Keekeewin

A. Common signs-Traveling.

B. Adgidatigwun-Sepulture.

2. Kekeenowin.

C. Medawin. . . Medicine.

D. Minor Jesukawin. . . Necromancy.

E. Wabino. . . Revelry.

F. Keorsawin. . . Hunting.

G. Higher Jesukawin. . . Prophecy.

H. Nundobununewin-War.

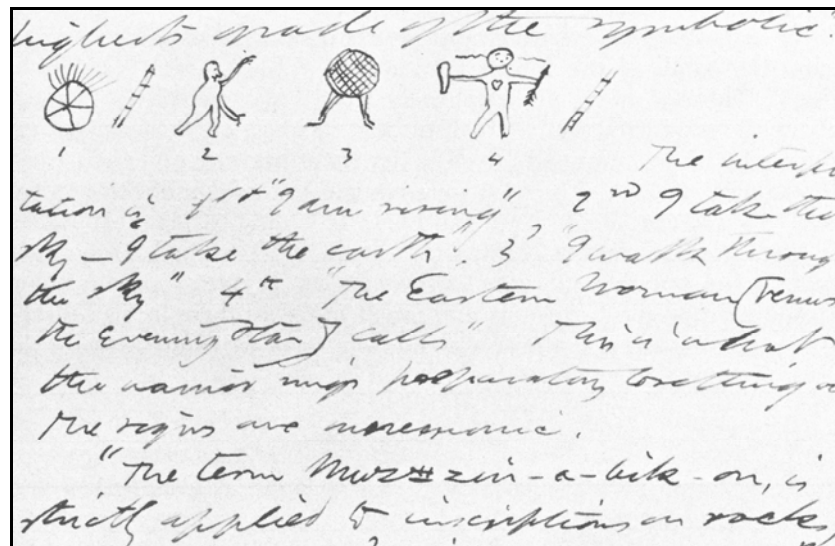
I. Sageawin Love.

K. Muzzunabikon-History. (IN V:109)



The turtle "a symbol of the earth." "The Indians are not acquainted with the true figure of the globe, but depict the sky as a half circle."  
(IN V:116)

I copy an example of the war symbols Nundobununewin on war.  
"The devices are chiefly of the ke-ke-no-win, or the highest grade of the symbolic."



One word to say I use if I mean a bonnet, another dif. termination word if I mean his bonnet—a dif. still, if I use an animate thing &c & these dif. verbs have dif. moods—tenses & persons, & conjugations. (IN VI:50)

## INDIAN RELICS

Thoreau's enthusiasm for Indian relics is seen throughout his *Journal* as well as in *Walden*. In the *Journal* he writes, "'Here,' I exclaimed, 'stood Tahatawan; and there' (to complete the period) 'is Tahatawan's arrowhead.' We instantly proceeded to sit clown on the spot I had pointed to, and I, to carry the joke, to lay bare an ordinary stone which my whim had selected, when lo! the first I laid hands on, the grubbing stone that was to be, proved a most perfect arrowhead, as sharp as if just from the hands of the Indian fabricator!!!" (*Journal* I, 7-8) In "The Bean-Field" Thoreau muses philosophically: "As I drew a still fresher soil about the rows with my hoe, I disturbed the ashes of unchronicled nations who in primeval years lived under these heavens, and their small implements of war and hunting were brought to the light of this modern day." (*Walden* p. 153) It is only natural that Indian relics was a topic for his "Indian Notebooks." More importantly, however, is the fact that Thoreau mistakenly wrote journal entries about Indian relics in the Notebooks and forgot to record them in his *Journal*. The following three passages from the Notebooks are compared with the condensed or different published *Journal* entries.

“Indian Notebook”

Walking over Clamshell Mar 18—'60 Ch. (with me) picked up a small piece of Ind. earthen ware. It was originally only 1/7 inch in thickness—and was made of clay mixed with pounded shells, some of the bits of shell mere 1/10 inch in diameter. The article was burnt brown (a clay-brown) while the inside was only gray. It lay amid the clam shells. (IN XI:227)

Journal:

C. picks up at Clamshell a very thin piece of pottery about one eighth of an inch thick, which appears to contain much pounded shell. (*Journal* XIII:201)

Indian Notebook:

May, 25, '58 I saw at the Egyptian Museum in New York 'a stone wedge found in the pyramid of Cheops'



Shaped like a very *thick & blunt* Ind. axe. Might have been found here—There were also knives of Ethiopian stone 6 to 7 inches long—and quite Indian like—with embroidered buttons & ragged cutting edge exactly like spear head & the same kind of stone—Shaped generally thus



In catalogue of museum. (IN X:98)

Journal:

Visited the Egyptian Museum. *Journal* X:443)

Indian Notebook:

Being in Worcester today Jan 4th '55 Mr Haven at the Antiquarian Library showed me a passage in Brereton?<sup>45</sup> of Gosnold's voyages in which the copper belt of tribes—the bracelets &c are described as in Lescarbot's—He spoke of an inscription found over 900 miles west of Montreal & mentioned by Kalm in some arctic language. Did I extract it? Of an English inscription on mica found in the breast of an Indian's remains (I think at grave yards) dated about the same time of the early Virginia settlements. Also prob an Alabama hoax an individual Lat inscription on stone dates 1200 something. (IN VII:510)

Journal:

To Worcester to lecture. Visited the Antiquarian Library of twenty-two or twenty-three thousand volumes. It is richer in pamphlets and newspapers than Harvard. One alcove contains Cotton Mather's library, chiefly theological works, reading which exclusively you

---

<sup>45</sup> Illegible to Thoreau. Brereton is the author of *The Discoverie of Virginiae*.

might live in his days and believe in witchcraft. Old leather-bound tomes, many of them as black externally as if they had been charred with fire. Time and fire have the same effect. Haven said that the Rev. Mr. Somebody had spent almost every day the past year in that alcove. (*Journal* VII:99)

The correspondent of *The Morning Chronicle*:

“At a meeting of the Royal Soc. of Northern Antiquaries at Copenhagen Feb. 25th 52 (Fred VII King of Denmark—the President) there was exhibited a remarkable ‘find’—a workshop of many tools and weapons from the Stone Age; they consisted of some hundreds of pieces, in various stages of preparation from the rough flint to the finished & delicate arrowhead; the whole found at one spot in the island of Anholt in the Cattegalt.” (IN V: 21-22)

As we have seen, Thoreau’s own comments are scattered through the Notebooks. In Volume I:4 he remarks, “In Landis field a large number of arrowheads have been found carefully deposited between two rocks.”

Squier’s *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*:

“Arrowpoints, differing from each other only in variety of stone of which they are composed, are discovered in all quarters of the globe. They have been found in. . . Liberia, in the tombs of Egypt. . . upon the plains of Greece. . . and in the rude monuments of ancient Scandinavia.” (IN II:56)

“A simple heap of earth or stones seems to have been the first monument which suggested itself to man; the Pyramid, the arch, and the obelisk are evidences of a more advanced state. But rude as are these primitive memorials, they have been but little impaired by time, while other more imposing structures have sunk into shapeless ruins.” (IN II:60)

### ARTS DERIVED FROM THE INDIANS

*Van der Donck's Description of New Netherlands:*

“The Indians have a yearly custom (which some of our Christians have also adopted) of burning the woods, plains and meadows in the fall of the year, when the leaves have fallen, and when the grass and vegetable substances are dry. Those places which are first, to render hunting easier, as the bush and vegetable growth renders the walking difficult for the hunter, and the crackling of the dry substances betrays him and frightens away the game. Secondly, to thin out and clear the woods of all dead substances and grass, which grow better the ensuing spring. Thirdly, to circumscribe and enclose the game within the lines of the fire, when it is more easily taken, and also because the game is more easily tracked over the burned parts of the woods.” (IN IV:36-37)

Commonly the trees are not killed-only the dead trees but sometimes the tree tops are burned. (IN IV:37)

One would think that Thoreau would have made some mention of this practice in his essay “The Succession of Forest Trees”; however, the only mention he makes of burning in this essay is that fire does not account for the propagation of tree seeds.

---

Here follows a list of sources Thoreau consulted in these online selections  
of his Indian Notebooks:

Adair, James. *The History of the American Indian: Particularly those Nations Advancing to the Mississippi*. London, 1775.

Bartram, William. *Travels Through North and South Carolina...Together with Observations on the Manners of the Indians*. Philadelphia, 1791.

Brand, John. *Observations on Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*.

Carver, Jonathan. *Three Years' Travels through the Interior Parts of North America*. 1797.

Charlevoix, R.P. Francois de. *Histoire et Description Generale de la Nouvelle France*. Paris, 1744.

Cook, James. *Journal*.

Crantz, David. *The History of Greenland*. London, 1767.

Culbertson, Thaddeus A. "A Journal of an Expedition to the Mauvaise Terres And the Upper Missouri in 1850," in *Smithsonian Institution: Fifth Annual Report*, 1850. Washington, 1851.

Donck, Adriaen Van Der. *Description of the New Netherlands*. 1655.

DeBry, Theodore. *Collectio Peregrinationum*. 1588.

Edwards, Frank J. *A Campaign in New Mexico*. 1848.

Heckewelder, John. *An Account of the History, Manners and Customs of The Indian Nations*.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Mission to the Delaware and Mohegan Indians*. 1820.

Hubbard, William. *General History of New England*.

Hutchinson, Thomas. *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*.

*Jesuit Relations*. (Le Jeune, Le Mercier and Rasles) 1632-1673.

Josselyn, John. *New England Rarities Discovered*.



- Kalm, Peter. *Travels into North America*. London, 1770-1771.
- Kane, Elisha K. *Arctic Exploration*. Philadelphia, 1856.
- Lescarbot, Marc. *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*. Paris, 1612.
- Mackenzie, Alexander. *Voyages from Montreal*. London, 1802.
- Massachusetts Historical Collections*. (Barber, Gookin, Gosnold, Levett, And Weymouth).
- Morgan, Lewis. *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois*. Rochester, 1851.
- Morton, Samuel George. *Crania Americana*. Philadelphia, 1839.  
*New York State Historical Society*.
- Osborn, Lieut. Sherard. *Stray Leaves from an Arctic Journal*. New York, 1852.
- Richardson, John. *Arctic Searching Expedition*. 1852.
- Schoolcraft, Henry Roe. *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*. 1851-1857.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Oneota: or Characteristics of the red Race of America*.
- Smet, Pierre Jean De. *Oregon Missions and Travels*. New York, 1847.
- Squier, Ephraim. *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*. 1848
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Serpent Symbol in America*. 1851.
- Tanner, John. *A Narrative of Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner*. New York, 1830.
- Theodat. Gabriel. *Le Grand Voyage du Pays des Hurons*. Paris, 1632.
- Town-Histories (of Concord)*.
- Transactions of the Historical and Literary Committee of the American Philosophical Society*. 1819.
- Winslow, Edward. *Relation or Journall of the Beginning and Proceedings of the English Plantation at Plimouth in New England*. London, 1622.

Young, Alexander. *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers*.

The bibliographic information provided above is how it appears in the original Indian Notebooks. This list of sources comprises less than 50% of the total number of books used throughout the 2,800 pages of the “Indian Notebooks.” Others include such authors as Thomas Eubank (*Life in Brazil*), Thomas Jefferson (*Notes on the State of Virginia*) and David Livingstone (*Travels in Africa*).

---

Bibliography  
and  
Further Commentary on the "Indian Notebooks"

- Christie, John Aldrich. *Thoreau as World Traveler*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.
- Fleck, Richard F. *The Indians of Thoreau*. Albuquerque: Hummingbird Press, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Thoreau as Amerindianist," *Studies in Language And Culture* (Japan), ix (1983), 225-236.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Thoreau as Mythmaker and Fabulist," *Rendezvous: Journal of Arts and Letters*, ix (Spring-Winter, 1974-1975), 23-32.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Henry Thoreau and John Muir among the Indians*. Hamden: Archon Books, 1985.
- Harding, Walter. *The Days of Henry Thoreau*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965.
- Howarth, William L. *The Literary Manuscripts of Henry David Thoreau*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974.
- Keiser, Albert. *The Indian in American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- Sayre, Robert F. *Thoreau and the American Indians*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Journal*, Eds., Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1906. 14 vols.

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Maine Woods*, introduction by Richard F. Fleck. New York: Harper Perennial Classic, 1987.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Thoreau's Minnesota Journey: Two Documents*, Ed., Walter Harding. Geneseo, New York: Thoreau Society Booklet No. Sixteen, 1962.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition*, edited by Jeffrey S. Cramer. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.