1846

Captain S. B. Thornton and sixty dragoons, riding out from General Zachary Taylor's encampment on the Rio Grande, were attacked by Mexican soldiers—the formal opening of the Mexican War that Polk had been waiting for. Commodore J. D. Sloat raised the American flag at Monterey and proclaimed the annexation of California. The Pennsylvania Railroad was incorporated. The last of the Mormons left Illinois on the great western trek. The phalanstery at Brook Farm, the community's largest building, burned down and brought to earth with it the whole utopian experiment. Dr. William Morton was the first successful user of ether as an anesthetic. The Jacob Donner party left Springfield, Illinois, for California.

Although Thoreau continued to make Walden his residence, it actually became during this year less of a home and more of a headquarters. He spent more time back in Concord than he had spent the season before; he wandered through the countryside a good deal; and he traveled up into the Maine woods in late summer. But he seems to have kept on writing as richly as when he lived beside the Pond. The composition of the Week went ahead solidly; so did the early work on Walden. Moreover, the night Thoreau stayed in jail because he refused as a matter of principle to pay the poll tax gave him the fuel for the later lecture and essay "Civil Disobedience." This was a year rich in both action and its results in writing. There are few letters and only scraps of the Journal, but there is little need for more.
From Charles Lane

New York February 17 / 46

Dear Friend,

The books you were so kind as to deposit about two years and a half ago with Messrs. Wiley and Putnam have all been sold, but as they were left in your name it is needful in strict business that you should send an order to them to pay to me the amount due. I will therefore thank you to enclose me such an order at your earliest convenience in a letter addressed to your admiring friend,

Charles Lane
Post Office New York City.

In 1843 Thoreau had been commissioned to take Lane's books to New York and sell them, that Lane might pay the debts incurred in the Fruitlands experiment conducted with Bronson Alcott. (See also letter of May 23, 1843, to Emerson.) MS., Leonard Kleinfeld; the manuscript is addressed, incidentally, to "Henry D. Thoreau, Sylvan, favored by A. B[ronson] A[lcott]."

From Charles Lane

Boonton, N. J., March 30, 1846.

Dear Friend,—

If the human nature participates of the elemental I am no longer in danger of becoming suburban, or super-urban, that is to say, too urbano. I am now more likely to be converted into a petrifaction, for slabs of rock and foaming waters never so abounded in my neighborhood. A very Peter I shall become: on this rock He has built his church. You would find much joy in these eminences and in the views therefrom.

My pen has been necessarily unproductive in the continued motion of the sphere in which I have lately been moved. You, I suppose, have not passed the winter to the world's unprofit.

You never have seen, as I have, the book with a preface of 450 pages and a text of 60. My letter is like unto it.

I have only to add that your letter of the 26th February did its work, and that I submit to you cordial thanks for the same.

Yours truly,
Charles Lane.

I hope to hear occasionally of your doings and those of your compreers in your classic ploughings and diggings.

To Henry D. Thoreau,
Concord Woods.

Text, Familiar Letters of Thoreau, pp. 147–48.

From Horace Greeley

New York, Aug. 16, 1846.

My dear Thoreau,

Believe me when I say that I mean to do the errand you have asked of me, and that soon. But I am not sanguine of success, and have hardly a hope that it will be immediate if ever. I hardly know a soul that could publish your article all at once, and "To be continued" are words shunned like a pestilence. But I know you have written a good thing about Carlyle—too solidly good, I fear, to be profitable to yourself or attractive to publishers. Didst thou ever, O my friend! ponder on the
significance and cogency of the assurance, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon," as applicable to Literature—applicable, indeed, to all things whatsoever. God grant us grace to endeavor to serve Him rather than Mammon—that ought to suffice us. In my poor judgment, if any thing is calculated to make a scoundrel of an honest man, writing to sell is that very particular thing.

Yours, hastily,
Horace Greeley.

Remind Ralph Waldo Emerson and wife of my existence and grateful remembrance.

Thoreau met Horace Greeley sometime during his sojourn on Staten Island in 1843. Greeley was interested in all the activities of the Transcendentalists, and the two became friends. Eventually Greeley became an unofficial literary agent for Thoreau and helped him to place many of his articles in magazines. This, the earliest extant letter between the two, concerns Thoreau's essay "Thomas Carlyle and His Works," which eventually found publication in Graham's Magazine for March and April 1847. MS., Lownes.

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I learned to-day, through Mr. [Rufus] Griswold, former editor of "Graham's Magazine," that your lecture is accepted, to appear in that magazine. Of course it is to be paid for at the usual rate, as I expressly so stated when I inclosed it to [George B.] Graham. He has not written me a word on the subject, which induces me to think he may have written you. Please write me if you would have me speak further on the subject. The pay, however, is sure, though the amount may not be large, and I think you may wait until the article appears, before making further stipulations on the subject.

Yours, very busy in our political contest,
Horace Greeley.

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From Horace Greeley

My Friend Thoreau,—

I know you think it odd that you have not heard further, and, perhaps blame my negligence or engrossing cares, but, if so, without good reason. I have to-day received a letter from Griswold, in Philadelphia, who says: "The article by Thoreau on Carlyle is in type, and will be paid for liberally." "Liberally" is quoted as an expression of Graham's. I know well the difference between a publisher's and an author's idea of what is "liberally"; but I give you the best I can get as the result of three letters to Philadelphia on this subject.

Success to you, my friend! Remind Mr. and Mrs. Emerson of my existence, and my lively remembrance of their various kindnesses.

Yours, very busy in our political contest,
Horace Greeley.