

1851

This was the peak year for the immigration of the Irish, whom Thoreau always regarded with interest. Population reports state that more than 221,000 were admitted to the United States during the year. The Hungarian patriot Louis Kossuth reached America and began his triumphal tour. He was received with great enthusiasm but soon found that Congressional support and American money were not forthcoming for the cause of Hungarian independence. Henry Clay resigned from Congress. John Audubon and James Fenimore Cooper died. The first electric railroad was established between Washington and nearby Bladensburg, Maryland. The Committee of Vigilance organized itself in San Francisco. Its record of sentences ran: four men hanged, one whipped, fourteen deported, one ordered to leave California, fifteen handed over to the authorities, and forty-one discharged. A Negro named Shadrach was arrested in Boston as a fugitive slave, rescued from jail at night by a mob of colored men, and sent off in safety to Canada.

Thoreau became thirty-four during this year. He had to have some dentistry done and acquired false teeth—to him a strong sign of man's mortality. No Yankee ascetic, though plainly no sensualist either, he thought and wrote about love and marriage. He disliked feminists, however, and complained about having to squire one of them, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, to a lecture. While respectable Boston obeyed the Fugitive Slave Law, his sympathies swung over to the abolitionists, although he was still ready to point out that there were many more forms of slavery than Negro slavery. There were strongly marked trends in his writing for 1851. The year saw no publications but a good deal of composition. The *Journal* is full—full and rich. There are several different kinds of writings in it, and they are all good. Oddly enough, only one letter has been found.

TO DR. THADDEUS W. HARRIS

Concord Feb 10th 1851

Dear Sir,

I return by the bearer De Laet's "Novus Orbis" &c. Will you please send me Alfred Hawkins' "Picture of Quebec" and "Silliman's Tour of Quebec"?

If these are not in—then Wyffliet's "*Descriptionis Ptolemaicae Argumentum*" &c and Lescarbot "*Les Muses de la Nouvelle France*."

Yrs respectfully  
Henry D. Thoreau

*The year before this Thoreau had gone with Ellery Channing on a trip to Montreal and Quebec. Dr. Harris was naturalist as well as Harvard librarian; he and Thoreau became friends primarily through Thoreau's growing interest in nature study. J. S. Wade, "The Friendship of Two Old-Time Naturalists," The Scientific Monthly, XXIII (August, 1926), 152-60, chronicles the relationship between Harris and Thoreau. MS., Harvard; previously unpublished.*

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From WILLIAM W. GREENOUGH ET AL.

Boston, March 7th, 1851.

Dear Sir:

It is proposed that a meeting of the Class of 1837 be held at the Revere House, on Wednesday, at 5 P. M., on the 19th of March next.

There are reasons for a deviation from the usual custom of the Class in assembling during the week of the annual Commencement.

In Boston and its vicinity are now collected a larger number of the Class than at any time since we left the University. A general desire has been expressed to take advantage of this circumstance, and to endeavor to re-awaken the interest natural to those who have been pleasantly associated together at an early period of life. Nearly fourteen years have elapsed since we left Cambridge, and but few have been in situations to bring them much into contact with any considerable number of their Class.

There is a manifest advantage in holding a meeting at this season of the year. Upon Commencement week, other engagements are liable to interfere, and the usual heat and fatigue of the days preclude any long duration of the meeting either in the afternoon or evening.

On the present occasion a dinner is proposed of which the expense will not exceed one dollar to each person.

It is desirable that a definite answer to this letter should be returned to the Committee previous to the 17th inst. If circumstances should compel the absence of any member, it is expected that he will contribute to the interest of the occasion by writing some account of himself since he left College.

Very truly,

Your friends and Classmates,  
William W. Greenough,  
William J. Dale,  
David Greene Haskins,  
J. H. Adams, Jr.

Class Committee.

Annexed is a list of the members of the Class supposed to be in this vicinity.

Allen,	Dall,	Holmes, 2d.
Bacon,	Davis, 1st.	Hubbard,
Belcher,	Davis, 2d.	Kimball,
Bigelow,	Dana,	Lane,
Clap,	Greenough,	March,
Clarke,	Haskins,	Peabody,
Dale,	Hawes,	Perry,