

Leech Lake, Upper Mississippi
April 11, 1834

Beloved Brother Waite

Taking it for granted that you are more local than myself, I direct to Horseheads. When we last met at Albany, I did not think of being here at this time, but I have, by the blessing of God, penetrated into the heart of the Indian Country. Leech Lake is about Lat. N. 47 [degree symbol] Long. W. from Washington 19 [degree symbol]. In whole numbers about 1300 miles West by 200 N of Utica. I suppose I must travel 2000 Miles or more to get a sight of your friendly Phila [?] again. Distance in this state is nothing, comparatively, but we have no Rail Road or Steamers in this wilderness & must be content to glide along silently in a frail Bark Canoe (or measure the miles by paces). If friends were always to sit down within Gun Shot of each other how would the Gospels reach the Heathen? In view of this, I have been constrained to leave home & friends & instead of mourning over the intervening extent of country rather, rejoice that I am counted worthy to go forth. You will see by the Missy [Missionary?] Herald for Jan'y 1834 that I was designated for Sandy Lake on the Mississippi. I arrived at that post about the 20th of Sept. last & was engaged during the fall & winter in teaching a small School. Being directed by Rev. Mr. Boutwell to join him at this post, I left Sandy Lake March 1st accompanied by one man & a dog train to draw my Baggage & provisions, & after 3½ days marching across marshes, Lakes & on Rivers, a route impassable except in winter & on foot, arrived here with no other injury than a little lameness of legs from walking on the Ice. It was truly cheering to me to greet this dear companion in this labour since, except his, I had not seen a Christian brother's face since leaving Le Pointe Aug. 20th. This first trial of exile from Chr. Society I was enabled to endure with cheerfulness; although at particular seasons could I have met some of the dear Circle among whom most of my religious days have been spent, it would have eased my heart of a load of Pensiveness, excited by a review of the days spent with them. But dear Br. Wait, I bless the Lord that He has brought me into this field. Through his Grace, I have most cheerfully endured any privations which I have yet experienced. But you will, I conclude, be anxious to know something of these Indians. This is the Largest of the Ojibeway [sic] Bands, numbering 150 to 200 families. The Report of the Am. Board for 1833 puts them down at 700 Souls.

They possess more of savage independence than any other band that I have seen. You can form but little ideas of their personal appearance from any of the Oneidas that I have seen. These are fine built, active men, accustomed to the chase & war in which they are more or less engaged almost every year with their old & neighboring Enemies, the Sioux. To enter into a detail of their manners & customs, I have neither room nor time. The strongest marks of paganism are stamped on all their conduct. "Kishamanito" is the good spirit, "Mudjemanito" the Bad Spirit, a Devil - almost every thing which is singular in its form whether Beast, fish, or reptile, inanimate, is an object of worship. They sometimes say of a Snake, "it is a Spirit." The large Black water Turtle is said to possess the attribute of Foreknowledge. In walking along the Beach yesterday I observed a stone of about one foot in diameter of peculiar shape, set up on the shore, at the entrance of a Portage. To such, the Indians frequently make an offering of tobacco. A large rock in a River they hardly ever pass without depositing a piece of Tobacco upon it. The Canadian Voyageurs when out of tobacco frequently find a present supply by stopping at these places. Tobacco is necessary in all their intercourses & worship - never chewed (I have never

seen an Indian who chewed & scarce ever used pure but adulterated with a weed & sometimes Bark dried & pulverized). They seem to think it best to secure the good will of all kind of spirits, hence they as often pray to the Devil as God. They invoke the Spirits of the waters & woods. I have frequently seen circles of Relatives engaged in the Solemn feasts around the grave of a deceased member of their family, preparatory to making a hunt. From the same religious reverence to the dead the trophies of War excursions such as Scalps – the stuffed skins of Hands & feet are ornamented & suspended at the head of the graves (of some warriors) from a pole striped with Vermillion. This I have frequently observed at Sandy Lake and Fondulac. Also Bodies deposited in coffins upon scaffold 8 or 10 feet high. This is not very common, I believe. There are several at Sandy Lake. I have not visited the Burying places of this Band or Gardens – for every family's burial place is their Garden in the most conspicuous place - a rise of Ground if there is any. The gardens are mostly across the Bay from 4 to 10 miles distant from my residence.

Sab. Eve Apl 20. Dr. Brother, a canoe arrived about 4 P.M. today from Sandy Lake, it returns in the morning & I expect my dear Br. Boutwell will go down in it on his way to St. Peters & this will be my last opportunity, probably, to send out letters until the traders go to Mackinaw. I must therefore in few words conclude. In 3 or 4 weeks I shall also leave with the clerks, who then take out their Furs to the Grand Depot – Sandy Lake – from thence to Fondulac via Sandy Lake, Savannah & St. Louis Rivers & unless I am directed to remain there the summer (as will probably not be) proceed to LePoint Lake Superior where I expect to meet Br. Boutwell who will proceed thither from St. Peters via Yellow Lake, the Station of our Brother (Fred H[?].) Ayer. It is my present intention to proceed from LePoint to Yellow Lake & remain until the traders return from Mackinaw unless directed to Fondulac. Whether I return to this place in the fall with Br. Boutwell will depend on circumstances, probably shall, if not will be sent to serve new ground. Thus you see, Dr. Brother, that I am indeed a wanderer on the face of the earth but I am willing to be for the good of the cause in which I am engaged. Surely you will afford time to fill a sheet to me, that I may know of God's dealings with You. Direct to this place "Via Fort Snelling, River St. Peters" care of Wm. A. Aitkins, Esq. Sandy Lake." Remember me to Thos. & Sylvester, your father's family. & William* when you shall write them & now may the God of Peace be with & prosper you. Amen.

* also Rev. Mr. Pratt if at your place.

Your affectionate Brother
Edmund F. Ely

Mr. Waite Talcott.



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