

Redwing Minnesota June 25th
1861

Mr. Auburn,

Dear Sir,

I was very glad
to find awaiting me, on my ar-
rival here on Sunday afternoon
a letter from you. I have
performed this journey in a
very dead and blue morning,
but nothing has come so near
winding me up as the receipt
of letters from Concord. I read
yours, and one from my
sister. (and Horace Mann's
yours) near the top of the
remarkable isolated bluff
here, called Burn Bluff or
the Grange, or Redwing Bluff,
some 450 feet high and half
a mile long - a bit of the
main bluff or bank standing
alone. The top, as you know,

rise to the general level of the
surrounding country, the river
having eaten out so much.
Yet the valley just above &
below this (we are at the head
of Lake Pepin) must be 3
or 4 miles wide.

I am not even so well informed
as to the progress of the war
as you suppose. I have seen
but one eastern paper (that,
by the way, was the Tribune)
for 5 weeks. I have not taken
much pains to get them, but,
necessarily, I have not seen any
paper at all for more than
a week at a time. The people
of Minnesota have seemed to
be more cold - & feel less
implicated in this war, than
the people of Massachusetts.
It is apparent that Massachusetts
will, on one side at least, be
doing much more than her
share, in carrying it on.

However, I have heard partly
with those of southern birth &
have seen but little way beneath
the surface - I was glad to be
told yesterday that there was
a good deal of meeting here
at Redwing the other day, when
the volunteers stationed at
Fort Snelling were ~~and~~
followed the regulations of the
of the war. They do not need
when their children go up
the river to occupy the deserted
posts, though they may have
to fight the Indians there.
I do not even know what
the attitude of England is at
present.

The grand feature hereabout
is, of course, the Mississippi
River. Too much can be said
of its grandeur, & of the
beauty of this portion of it -
from Dunhith - I prob. from
Rock Island - I think place of
St Paul is a dozen miles below

the Falls of St Anthony, or near
the head of an interrupted naviga-
tion on the main stream about
2000 miles from its mouth.
There is not a "rap" below that,
& the river is almost as wide in
the upper as the lower part
of its course. Steamers go
up to the Snake Rapids, above
the Falls, near a hundred
miles further, & then you
are fairly in the pine wood
& lumbering country - Thus it
flows from the pine to the
palm.

The lumber, as you know, is
sent chiefly at the Falls of St.
Anthony (which is not far from
the big ports far below) having
given rise to the towns of St.
Anthony, Minneapolis &c &c -
In coming up the river from
Duluth you meet with great
rafts of sawed lumber & of logs -
20 rafts or more in length by
5 or 6 miles, floating down
all from the pine regions.

above the Falls. An old
Maine man however who has fol-
lowed the same business here,
told me that the sources of the
Mississippi were comparatively
free from rocks & rapids,
making easy work for them,
but he thought that the
timber was more knotty here than
in Maine.

It has appeared that about half
the men whom I have spoken
with in Minnesota, whether
travellers or settlers, were from
Maine.

After spending some three
weeks in and about St Paul,
St Anthony, and Minneapolis,
we made an excursion in a
steamer some 300 or more
miles up the Minnesota (St.
Peter's) River, to Redwood, or
the Lower Sioux Agency, in order
to see the Plains & the Sioux,
& also were to receive their annual
payment there. This is com-

evently The river of Minnesota,
for she shares the Mississippi
in Wisconsin, and its great
estimable value to her. It flows
through a very fertile country,
destined to be famous for its
wheat; but it is a remarkably
winding stream, so that Red
wood is only half as far from
its mouth by land as by water.
There was not a straight reach
a mile in length, so far
as we went, - generally you
could not see a quarter of a
mile of water, & the bank
was steadily turning this way
or that. At the greater
bends, as the Traverse des
Ivoux, some of the passengers
were landed & walked across
& he taken in on the other
side. Two or three times you
could have thrown a stone
across the neck of the isthmus
while standing from one to three
miles around it. It was a

The current, and completely
blocked up & blocked the
river, one end of the boat
resting on each shore. And yet
we would haul ourselves round
again with the windlass & cable
in an hour or 2, though the
boat was about 150 feet
long & drew some 3 feet of
water or, often, water and sand.
It was one consolation to know
that in such a case we were
all the while damming the
river and raising it. One
man ran fairly out on concentric
rocks, with a shaft that aroused
all the passengers, & rested there
with a male stick below with
a lamp reflecting & fired a hole,
but he did not. Insects & saw-
flies were so common that I
forgot to mention them. The
rattle of the boat was blinding and
one was the oddening music.
However, as long as the broken
did not burst, we knew

That no serious accident was
likely to happen. Yet this
was a ~~single~~ navigable
river, more so than the
Mississippi above the Falls,
& it is owing to it very worked
run. I did it straight, but
would not only be very swift,
but soon run out. There was
from 10 to 15 rocks with run
the mouth & from 8 to 10 on
12 at Belmont. Though the
current was swift, I did
not see a "rip" in it, & only
3 or 4 rocks. For 3 months
in the year, it can be navigated
by small steamers about
twice as far as we went
or to the source in Big Stone
Lake, & a former Capt. A. B. B. told me that at high water
it was thought that such
a steamer might pass in the
Red River.

In short this river proved
so very long and navigable
that I was reminded of the
last letter on ^{the} ~~the~~ voyage
of the Baron La Hontan
(written near the end of the
17th century I think) in which
he states that after reaching the
Mississippi ^(the Illinois or Wisconsin) at the limit of pro-
vision exploration westward, he
voyaged up it with his Indians,
and at length turned up a great
river coming in from the west
which he called "La Riviere
Longue" & he relates various
improbable things about the
country & its inhabitants, so
that this letter has been re-
garded as a mere fabrication
- a mere story - & not
a fact. But I am somewhat
inclined now to reconsider the
matter.

The Governor of Minnesota,

(Ramsey,) - The Superintendent of
Ind. Affairs in this quarter, & the
recently appointed Ind. Agent were on
board; also a German band
from St. Paul, a small canon
for salutes, & the money for
the Indians - (and the gambler,
it was said, who was to bring it
back in another boat). There
were about 100 passengers
chiefly from St. Paul, and more
or less recently from the N. Eastern
States; also half a dozen young
educated Englishmen. Chancing
to speak with one who sat next
to me, when the voyage was nearly
half over, I found that he was
a son of the Rev. Samuel
May, & a classmate of mine,
& had been looking for us at
St. Anthony.

The last of the little settle-
ments on the river, was New
Ulton, about 100 miles this
side of Redwood. It consists

Wholly of German. We left
them 100 barrels of salt,
which will be worth something
more when the water is
low, than at present.

Redwood is a new locality,
scarcely an ^{Indian} village - where there
is a store & some houses have
been built for them. We
were now fairly on the great
plains, and looking south,
and after walking that way 3
miles, could see no trace in
that horizon. The Captains
said to be feeding within
25 or 30 miles.

A regular council was held
with the Indians who had come
in on their ponies, and speeches
were made on both sides thro'
an interpreter, quite in the
described mode; the Indians,
as usual, having the advantage
in point of truth & earnestness,
and therefore of eloquence.

The most prominent chief was
named Little Crow. They were
quite disappointed with the white
man's treatment of them & probably
have reason. These. This council
was ^{the} continued for 2 or 3 days
- the payment to be made the
2^d day - and another payment
to the hands a little higher up
on the Yellow Medicine (a tributary
of the Minnesota) a few days
thereafter.

In the afternoon the half-breed
dancers performed a dance, at the
request of the Governor, for our am-
usement. What our benefit - &
then we took leave of them. ^{at}
The official who had come to
trade with them.

Excuse these pencil marks
but my inkstand is unserviceable
& I can only write my letter
at the bar. I could tell you
more & perhaps more interesting
things if I had time.
I am considerably better than
when I left home, but still
far from well.

Our faces are steadily set
towards home. Will you
please let my sister know
that we shall probably start
for Milwaukee & Madison
in a day or 2 (or soon as we
hear from home) via Princes
Sau Claire & not La Crosse.

I am glad to hear that you
have written to Chalmers &
to, I believe, me of some re-
sponsibility.

Yours truly

Henry D. Thoreau

Ms. A. 9. 2. 11. 13