

John Pickering an Wilhelm von Humboldt, 15.10.1833

Handschrift: Grundlage der Edition: Ehem. Preußische Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, gegenwärtig in der Jagiellonen-Bibliothek Krakau, Coll. ling. fol. 52, Bl. 61–62

Druck: Mueller-Vollmer 1976, S. 328, 330 (Ausz.)

Nachweis: Mueller-Vollmer 1993, S. 209

Mattson 1980, Nr. 12414

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[61r] Sir,

On recurring to your last letter (dated the 27.th of October 1831) which, however,

did not reach me till some time after that date, I should feel quite ashamed of myself for not having made an immediate reply to it, if I were not persuaded, that your kindness would ascribe this delay to necessary causes & not to any want of inclination on my part. The truth unfortunately is, Sir, as I have before observed to you, that my engagements of business in this city leave no leisure for study; and I feel unwilling to send you a letter unless it can be accompanied with something of value.

I am now happy to have it in my power to transmit to you an important work on our American Languages – the Abnaki Dictionary of [Father Rasles](#), of which I have frequently spoken to you. After several attempts we have at length succeeded in getting it printed. This has been done by the [American Academy of Arts and Sciences](#) (in [Boston](#)) at whose request I undertook to discharge the editorial duties that should be requisite. This laborious task has occupied all my leisure hours for many months; the manuscript, though written in a fair hand, is in many places difficult to read, and has numerous abbreviations; besides which, there were other difficulties.

I have added to the Dictionary an Introductory Memoir & a few Notes, in order to inform general readers of its value & of some of the results to be obtained from works of this kind. You will find |61v| nothing in my part of the publication which will be new or useful to yourself; unless, possibly, some of the etymologies at the bottom of the pages, and the remarks, in the Supplementary Notes, on the characteristic differences of certain dialects of the Lenapé family shall be found worthy of your notice. Without an exact & minute attention to the dialectical distinctions, I need not inform you, Sir, that we shall lose half the value of our materials for comparative Philology. I beg leave, in the present instance, to refer you to my remarks on pp. 571, 572, of the Notes.

I regret much, that I could not possibly find time to make an Index of the Indian words, which is highly necessary, in order to give the greatest practicable utility to the work; but my engagements would not permit this additional labour. Perhaps I may do it in the next volume of our Memoirs.

With the Dictionary of Rasles I send you a copy of [Cotton](#)'s Vocabulary of the Massachusetts dialect, (of about the same epoch) the five copies which I sent some years ago having, as you inform me, been lost.

It gives me great pleasure to learn, that my little Article on the Indian Languages (published in our Encyclopedia Americana) has been read by you with any interest, and that you say I have understood your views. This favourable opinion I must

not ascribe so much to its intrinsic merit as to your benevolence and candour. I need not assure you, Sir, that the Article was intended, not for such readers |62r| as yourself, but only for those who are unacquainted with the subject. I am glad to see that it has attracted the notice of the German Reviewers in the Heidelb. Jahrb. d. Literatur, N.º 33 for the year 1832.^[a]

I send you on this occasion two other books, viz: The Gospel of S.^t Luke, in the Seneka tongue (of the Iroquois stock) and the Gospels of Matthew, Mark & John in the language of Hawaii (Owhyhee).^[b] You will be pleased to see that our missionaries have adopted my views as to their orthography, instead of following our irregular & barbarous English method. They assure me that the children of the Islanders learn to read more rapidly, beyond all comparison, than our children here learn to read English; which facility they ascribe almost entirely to the simplicity of the orthography. But there is, after all, an extreme difficulty, they say, in deciding upon some of the sounds in those languages, in consequence of the careless & irregular habits of speaking among the people in general. Upon this subject I will give you a few details in a future letter, if the subject is within the range of your inquiries.

I am greatly obliged to you for your various Memoirs accompanying your last letter; they are all of the highest interest to me personally, as they are among the few books which I read more than once; and I hope by the assiduous study of them to make my letters more worthy of your attention. Your Correspondence with Schiller is read with much interest by our German scholars.

Permit me to say, that we are anxiously looking for your great work on the American Languages. Your Introduction (which you mentioned some years ago) has never reached me; perhaps you have not yet completed it. I hope |62v| your eyes & your right hand, of which you formerly complained, have recovered their strength.

On the subject of Rasles' Dictionary I beg leave to add further, that, as the interpretation is in French I hope it will attract more general attention on the Continent of Europe than it would in English. The notice of such publications in your ablest Reviews has a powerful effect in our country to encourage the study of

a) |Editor| Die Angabe Pickering's ("N.º 33") bezieht sich auf die Numerierung der Beiträge. [FZ]

b) |Editor| Zu dem Band, bestehend aus dem Matthäus-Evangelium sowie den beigedruckten Evangelien des Markus und Lukas, siehe Schwarz 1993, S. 60 Nr. 455. [FZ]

the aboriginal languages; and we need every stimulus to incite our young men to investigations, which lie out of the ordinary range of their studies.

I have lately had the pleasure of seeing [M.^r Harrison](#), whom I formerly took the liberty of introducing to you. He speaks of your kind attentions to him, with many other particulars, which much interested me and demand my thanks.

I have recently had the high gratification of obtaining your portrait, in a lithographic print of [Oldermann](#), published by Sachse and Comp^y. at [Berlin](#)^[c]; but I wish much to be assured that it is a good likeness: May I ask of you, if it is so considered.

Can you inform me, whether [M.^r Niebuhr](#)'s edition of the Byzantine Historians will be now continued, & by what editor. In my letter to you of the [29.th of March 1830](#), I mentioned that we have in [our University Library](#) a MS. of the historian [Glycas](#), which might give some Various Readings of value; on which subject I beg leave to refer you to my letter.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

your very obedient

& faithful servant

Jn^oPickering

Boston, United States,

Oct. 15, 1833.

c) [Editor] Diese Firma wurde von Humboldts ehemaligem Schreiber [Louis Friedrich Sachse](#) gegründet: Annette Schlagenhauff: Die Kunst zu Handeln: Louis Friedrich Sachse – Lithographie, Kunstförderer und Kunsthändler in Berlin. In: Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen 2000, S. 259–294, bes. S. 261 Anm. 11. [FZ]