

Appendix E. Transcript of letter from Pauline Johnson to Ernest Thomas Seton dated August 2, 1905

Winona. Ontario.
August 2nd.

My dear Wolf – Man

From somewhere in the remote North Bay region I write, thanking you for your most flattering letter to Mr. Gerald Christis. By-the-way I have never had a reply, which seems peculiar, but I find these English Agents are rather unbusinesslike at best.

I am here for the summer – a brief rest from traveling. Then we go west for September and after that, if fortune is good to me I shall assail England whether I can command an Agent or not. Just one thing has balked me, and that is the lack of funds, and herein I want your advice, suggestions, and learning of American ‘Ways and Means.’ You will help me I am confident, if you can. Of course you know of my collection of Indian historical treasures, but I doubt if I ever spoke to you of the greatest. That is one of the ‘League’ wampum belts, used at the time of the Confederation of the ‘Five Nations’ now The Six Nations. When Hiawatha succeeded in part in his vast scheme of ‘Universal Brotherhood’ of the then known Nations. *I came by this belt most fortunately as, when the old fire-keeper died, his son took upon himself to dispose of the fifty-seven ancient national belts, thus destroying our archives.* My belt is one of the largest and most famous. It was the *identical* one my grandfather selected to hold in his hands when the Six Nations representative chiefs were photographed for the late Dr. Hale’s book and translation of the Iroquois Rites.³² I have [enclosed(?)] a copy of the photo, and also have borrowed a reprint of the paper copied from the journal of the Anthropological Institute of Feb. ’97.³³ I am stating all this to show you that this wampum of mine is recorded by our best Ethnologist, Horatio Hale, and also as an introduction to its value. Now I am compelled to part with this belt if I would get to England again. It is my only very valuable asset, and you may be well assured that my resources are few when I even think of parting with this, for wampum is the most priceless of all Indian relics, and this particular belt has not only historical value but cannot possibly be duplicated. Now— Wolf Man, do you know where I can find a purchaser for this? Museums are out of the question, as their exhibits are always presented to them. The wampum is valued at about sixteen hundred dollars, as all the ‘Hiawatha League’ belts are, about of such value, but of course I would accept much less for it. I am not in touch with The Thinking American Public as you are, and I thought you could suggest to me a probable collector. Most collectors however seem to know nothing of the ‘Hiawatha League.’ Our older Indians

³² Pauline Johnson uses the older, more obscure meaning of the word “identical” in the sense of “the same,” rather than today’s more common usage, “similar.”

³³ The reprint Johnson is most likely referring to is “Four Huron Wampum Records” by Horatio Hale, which was published in the Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland in February 1897. This article includes a reproduction of the Pitt Rivers Museum images taken by Hale in 1871 (1897a:Plate XIII, Plate XIV; see Figures 3a–b and 5) but does not include a description of the Six Nations wampum belts as suggested by Pauline Johnson’s letter.