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## Documents Online

**Title:** Letter from Harriet Lane to Lily Macalester

**Date:** September 13, 1857

**Location:** I-Friends-2000-8

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Soldier's Home,  
Tuesday. Sept 13. 1857.

My dear Lily,

I had no idea  
you would write me from  
West Point, & therefore  
was not very much  
disappointed. I know  
how full of pleasure your  
visit are - how your  
hands are filled with  
pleasant duties - & how  
your eyes are dazzled  
<sup>with</sup> the glitter & glare of  
brass buttons - & knowing  
all this, dear Lily, I  
really did not expect you

To write. We all regret  
you could not pay us  
a visit here this  
summer - but as the  
Floyds have been absent  
the entire season, you  
would not have enjoyed  
the country much.  
Mr Floyd writes very  
cheerfully, but does  
not consider himself  
restored in health. Mrs  
Floyd is far from well,  
& has been miserable  
all summer - They will  
return very soon.

Washington has been  
shockingly dull this  
summer - a few foreigners

were the only persons  
left in town. This last  
week has brought a few  
of the wanderers home.  
We are having delightful  
weather, & I enjoy my  
daily rides intensely—  
I have a nice little  
beau, always ready at  
my command. He lives  
close by, & you can  
imagine how charmingly  
convenient it is. We  
will return to town by  
the 1<sup>st</sup> of Oct. probably  
earlier;— town looks so  
dusty & dirty, that I  
hate to think of it until  
the cold weather.  
Did I tell you that

Your chances were all  
over with Dr King; &  
that he astonished us  
all this summer, by  
bringing home one fine  
day—a nouvelle mariée?  
You shall have your  
Army Register in a day  
or two.

I fear I cannot do more  
than I promised you  
in the Spring dear Lily—  
& that is, to pass a few  
days with you, if you  
are still in the country  
when I go to Pennsylvania.  
You may be sure I will  
stay as long as possible.  
My "leave of absence" must  
be very short this Autumn.  
Miss Hetsy is not coming to

Washington until the  
winter. - James Henry  
is away, & when I leave,  
Uncle will be entirely  
alone - so I shall only  
be from home long enough  
to "rig up" for the winter  
& take a glimpse at  
some few friends. I must  
go to Lancaster - my brother  
has lost one of his children  
this summer, & I feel it  
to be a duty to go to see  
them - there are also other  
things <sup>that</sup> make it my duty  
to pass a few days in  
Lancaster this Autumn.  
We expect a visit from  
our old friend Sir H. Holland  
whom I believe you know.

He has no doubt arrived  
in the country, & expects  
to be here the last of  
the month.

Mr & Mrs Henry!!! were  
at Lake George when last  
I heard from them. They  
will pay a little visit  
to Annapolis, & these parts,  
& settle down in New York  
by the 1<sup>st</sup>. He is too  
happy to write - & advises  
every one "to go & do likewise".  
I am bound to believe  
what you say about the  
"Medico" - & if I find myself  
deceived, my faith in  
woman is forever gone.  
When is Sally Butler to

be married? I hear Dr  
Vistar was engaged to  
a lovely girl here, a  
Miss McKane, & that he  
heard some rumours  
about her family - (doubtless  
unfounded) - & broke the  
engagement. She has felt  
it very keenly ever since,  
for she was sincere. I wish  
had better keep an  
eye to her lover.

Mrs Pitt has returned  
to Philia - & has been very  
ill within a the last  
few weeks, but I trust  
she is quite well again.  
Give my love to your father.  
Write me, dear Lily, I be  
sure that I will see  
you sometime this Autumn

Though my visit will not  
be as long as I should  
like it.

Believe me, always, dear  
Lily -

Yours very affectionately  
Harriet Lane.

Excuse carelessness, as the  
postman is waiting - &  
There is no time "to review."  
What think you of Douglas's  
pronouncements? ...

Soldier's House  
Tuesday Sept. 13, 1857

My dear Lily,

I had no idea you would write me from West Point, & therefore was not very much disappointed. I know how full of pleasure your visit are - how your hands are filled with pleasant duties - & how your eyes are dazzled <sup>^with</sup> the glitter & glare of brass buttons & knowing all this, dear Lily, I really did not expect you to write. We all regret you could not pay us a visit here this summer - but as the Floyd's have been absent the entire season, you would not have enjoyed the country much. Mr. Floyd writes very cheerfully, but does not consider himself restored in health. Mrs. Floyd is far from well, & has been miserable all summer - they will return very soon. Washington has been shockingly dull this summer - a few foreigners were the only persons left in town. This last week has brought a few of the wanderers home. We are having delightful weather, & I enjoy my daily rides intensely - I have a nice little beau, always ready at my command. He lives close by, & you can imagine how charmingly convenient it is. We will return to town by the 1<sup>st</sup> of Oct. probably earlier; - town looks so dusty & dirty, that I hate to think of it until the cold weather. Did I tell you that your chances were all over with Dr. King? & that he astonished us all this summer, by bringing home one fine day - a *nouvelle mariée*? You shall have your Army Register in a day or two.

I fear I cannot do more than I promised you in the spring dear Lily - & that is, to pass a few days with you, if you are still in the country when I go to Pennsylvania. You may be sure I will stay as long as possible. My "leave of absence" must be very short this Autumn. Miss Hetty is not coming to Washington until the winter. - James Henry is away, & when I leave, Uncle will be entirely alone - so I shall only be from home long enough to "rig up" for the winter & take a glimpse at some few friends. I must go to Lancaster - my brother has lost one of his children this Summer, & I feel it to be a duty to go see them - there are also other things <sup>^that</sup> make it my duty to pass a few days in Lancaster this Autumn. We expect a visit from our old friend Sir H. Holland, whom I believe you know! He has no doubt arrived in the country, & expects to be here the last of the month.

Mr. & Mrs. Henry!!! were at Lake George when last I heard from them. They will pay a little visit to Annapolis, & these parts, & settle down in New York by the 1<sup>st</sup>. He is too happy to write - & advises every one "to go & do likewise." I am bound to believe what you say about the "Medico" - & if I find myself deceived, my faith in woman is forever gone. When is Sally Butler to be married? I hear Dr. Wistar was engaged to a lovely girl here, a Miss McKane, & that he heard some rumour about her family - (doubtless unfounded) - & broke the engagement. She has felt it very keenly ever since, for she was sincere. Sarah had better keep an eye to her lover.

Mrs. Plitt has returned to Phil<sup>ia</sup>. - & has been very ill within a the last few weeks, but I trust she is quite well again. Give my love to your father. Write me, dear Lily, & be sure that I will see you some time this Autumn though my visit will not be as long as I should like it.

Believe me, always, dear Lily - Yours very affectionately

Harriet R. Lane

Excuse carlessness, as the postman is waiting - & there is no time "to review." What think you of Douglas' pronunciamento?!!!

[letter sent to Lily Macalester]

LANE, HARRIET.

Autograph Letter Signed as First Lady, Soldier's Home, 13 September 1857. 8 pp., 8" x 5".

The ward and niece of James Buchanan, Harriet Lane served as First Lady for her bachelor uncle throughout his Presidency. Attractive and vivacious, she achieved great social success and popularity.

Here, Lane writes from Soldier's Home, the Georgetown cottage where she and Buchanan would often spend the summer months during his administration. In this long, chatty letter to an old friend, she passes on news of many mutual acquaintances, some of them very well-known political figures such as Secretary of War John B. Floyd. Lane also remarks that *"Washington has been shockingly dull this summer - a few foreigners were the only persons left in town.... We will return to town by the 1st of Oct, probably earlier; - town looks so dusty & dirty, that I hate to think of it until the cold weather."* She explains that she will be able to visit her friend in Pennsylvania only briefly. *"My 'leave of absence' must be very short this Autumn.... when I leave, Uncle will be entirely alone, so I shall only be from home long enough to 'rig up' for the winter & take a glimpse at some few friends. I must go to Lancaster - my brother has lost one of his children this summer, & I feel it to be a duty to go to see them."* In a postscript, Lane adds, *"What think you of Douglas' pronunciamento?!!!"*

Lane's letters as First Lady are quite scarce, and a long, very personal one such as this is quite rare.