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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
^{with} 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 1st 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 ^{that} 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 1st. 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 Phil^{ia} - & 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 ^{^with} 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 1st 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 ^{^that} 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 1st. 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^{ia}. - & 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.