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## Documents Online

**Title:** Letter from William Bigler to A. Boyd Hamilton

**Date:** February 6, 1858

**Location:** I-SpahrB-undated-3

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Slaves

Washington City, D.C.  
Feb. 6th 1838

A. Boyd Hamilton:

Many thanks my dear sir, for your kind attention. The result in the House on the question of instructions is peculiarly gratifying to the President, for whatever others may think, he is a sincere believer in the wisdom of terminating the angry controversy in the manner indicated in his message. So firm is his faith fixed in this policy, that he seems totally indifferent to the outside storm. He says whenever the people begin to contemplate the consequences of rejection, & a half a dozen, or more southern States are to be seen withdrawing from Congress, and when the fanatics of Kansas, having had this question handed over to them, shall commence to make a constitution that shall



abolish not only slavery, but the fugitive  
slave law, & the Dred Scott decision, they will  
embrace his policy with entire unanimity.  
There is much in the proceedings of ~~the~~  
Lecompton Convention that is unpleasant and  
unsatisfactory to him & also myself; & were  
I to act in reference to these things alone,  
I too might be in the opposition; but I feel  
required to consider the consequences of admission  
against those of rejection, & do what seems best  
for the Country in the future. Looking at the  
question from that point of view, and with  
a high sense of duty under what I know  
to be great responsibility, I go with the  
President, & I shall stand or fall by him.  
What I am doing is in accordance  
with my own best judgment; and  
if I doubted, I should feel required to



yield much to the mature judgment of the  
President, & I should sacrifice much before  
I would be found in the ranks of those  
~~that~~ <sup>who</sup> attempt to strike down & disgrace  
the first President our State has ever  
had.

Very truly,

Your friend,

Wm. Bigler



1857 Oct 2

New York

W. C. C.

Albany, N. Y.



Headnote: this letter was written in 1858 by the former Democratic Governor of Pennsylvania and current United States Senator, William Bigler. It was written to a friend, A. Boyd Hamilton and discusses the president at the time, James Buchanan as well as his stance on Kansas and the Lecompton Convention. Bigler clearly states that his stance is along the side of the President's in pertaining to the issues that he mentions. While Bigler seems to oppose the stance that President Buchanan holds on the issue of slavery, he feels that in order to avoid a much greater confrontation he must concede his personal beliefs and convictions and support Buchanan. He feels that this is what is best for the state and he also feels that no member of Pennsylvania should stand against the first president from the state.

Washington City. D.C.

Feb. 6<sup>th</sup> 1858

A. Boyd Hamilton:<sup>1</sup>

Many thanks my dear sir, for your kind attention. The result in the House <sup>2</sup>on the question of instructions is peculiarly gratifying to the President, for whatever others may think, he is a sincere believer in the wisdom of terminating the angry controversy in the manner indicated in his message. So firm is his faith fixed in the policy, that he seems totally indifferent to the outside storm. He says whenever the people begin to contemplate the consequences of rejection, and a half a dozen, or more southern States are to be seen withdrawing from Congress, and when the fanatics of Kansas<sup>3</sup>, having had this question handed over to them, shall commence to make a constitution that shall abolish not only slavery, but the fugitive slave law<sup>4</sup>, and the Dred Scott decision<sup>5</sup>, they will embrace his policy with entire unanimity. There is much in the proceedings of the Lecompton Convention<sup>6</sup> that is impleasant and unsatisfactory to him and also myself; and were I to act in reference to these things alone, I too might be in the opposition; but I

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Boyd Hamilton (1808-1896) resided in Philadelphia as well as in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He was a printer by profession and also had financial dealings with President Buchanan in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

<sup>2</sup> Pertains to the dismissal of the Lecompton Convention within the House and the Senate, it was introduced by President James Buchanan, in an attempt to maintain peace between slave holders and abolitionists.

<sup>3</sup> Citizens in Kansas that fought for either pro-slavery or the abolishment of slavery. This led to a mini civil war. James A. Rawley, *Race & Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War*, Philadelphia: Lippincott 1969.

<sup>4</sup> A law passed in 1850 that stated that a slave that escapes into another state or territory be returned.

<sup>5</sup> A decision by the United States Supreme Court that ruled that African slave or their descendants were not protected by the Constitution, and could never become a citizen of the United States. United States Supreme Court, *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, 1846, Washington University in St. Louis, The Revised Dred Scott Case Collection.

<sup>6</sup> A gathering in Lecompton, Kansas were the territory of Kansas voted on which constitution to implement as the its' state constitution. It was between the Lecompton Constitution supported by slave holders and the Topeka constitution which drew its support from abolitionists. The Lecompton Constitution was voted down by the U.S. House of Representatives. Thus clearing the way for Kansas to become a free state in 1861.

The Lecompton Constitutional Convention, *Lecompton Constitution*, November 7, 1857, Kansas State Archives. Item # 103081.



feel required to consider the consequences of admission against those of rejection, and do what seems best for the country in the future. Looking as the question from that point of view, and with a high sense of duty under what I know to be great responsibility, I go with the President<sup>7</sup>, and I shall stand or fall by him. What I am doing is in accordance with my own best judgment; and if I doubted, I should feel required to yield much to the mature judgment of the President, and I should sacrifice much before I would be found in the ranks of those who attempt to strike down and disgrace the first President our State has ever had.

Very truly,

Your Friend,

William Bigler<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> President James Buchanan (1857-1861) the first President of the United States from Pennsylvania, he supported the rights of slave holders in an effort to avoid the fractioning of the Union. Born 1791, Died 1868. Buchanan was also a Dickinson College Alumni, Class of 1809.

<sup>8</sup> William Bigler (1814-1880) owned his own printing press before he began serving as a state senator in 1841. Was elected Governor of Pennsylvania in 1851 and served until 1855. He sided with President Buchanan on the complicated issue of slavery, agreeing that by permitting slavery was what was best suited for the Union at that time. After his role as a governor he returned to a seat on the United States Senate.