

## THE LANE FAMILY OF LANCASTER

*Despite the overshadowing influence of James Buchanan, the Lane Family managed to chalk up a few points of its own, all of which are told here by the Venerable Bede of Lancaster.*

### THE LANES COULD SAY, "DEAR UNCLE"

With the destruction of two business houses on East King Street, it brings to mind the names of those once actively engaged at these places. In imagination we can see the spirits of William L. Peiper (cashier of the Lancaster County National Bank) and John N. Lane, merchant, in animated conversation on the work of the wrecking crews, calling down imprecations upon them.

In 1845 the two wealthiest men in Lancaster, having been blessed with prosperity but not with posterity, had a long line of those who could address them, "Dear Uncle," in loving and grateful affection, for to them the double estates were apportioned most liberally. These children - most with the name of Lane - were related to John N. Lane, merchant, and James Buchanan, lawyer and president, both of Lancaster; the former worth \$250,000, the latter a mere \$120,000, small in relation to modern fortunes, but a huge sum for those days.<sup>1</sup>

Jane, the sister of James Buchanan, married Elliot T. Lane, of Mercersburg, and they became the parents of the justly renowned Harriet, about whom we shall devote the greater part of our story, and of six other children.

John N. Lane, brother of Elliot, had a dry goods store at 24 East King Street, with a large trade among city and country folks. After his death, January 30, 1856, the store was operated by his nephews, James B. and G. Taylor Lane, and continued until 1896 by Lane and Company, and operated by John A. Charles and John B. Roth.

Anything about John N. Lane, who his parents were, or other enlightening information, seems to be lost. All we know is that he amassed a fortune. A biographer wrote that he "was a successful merchant of Lancaster city, and the wealthiest of our deceased citizens."<sup>2</sup> We do not wish

to infer that money was his idol, his sole interest; but even the local newspapers had scant notice in the obituaries. He had land holdings in Cambria, Berks, Franklin, Forest, Schuylkill and York counties, and in Philadelphia and Harrisburg. He was at one time president of the Columbia Bank.

The administrators<sup>3</sup> of his estate were James B. and G. Taylor Lane. The noted riflemaker, Henry E. Leman, was appointed guardian over the estates of George W. and Susan Webb, grandnephew and grandniece, of Mr. Lane.<sup>4</sup>

The list of legatees follows:

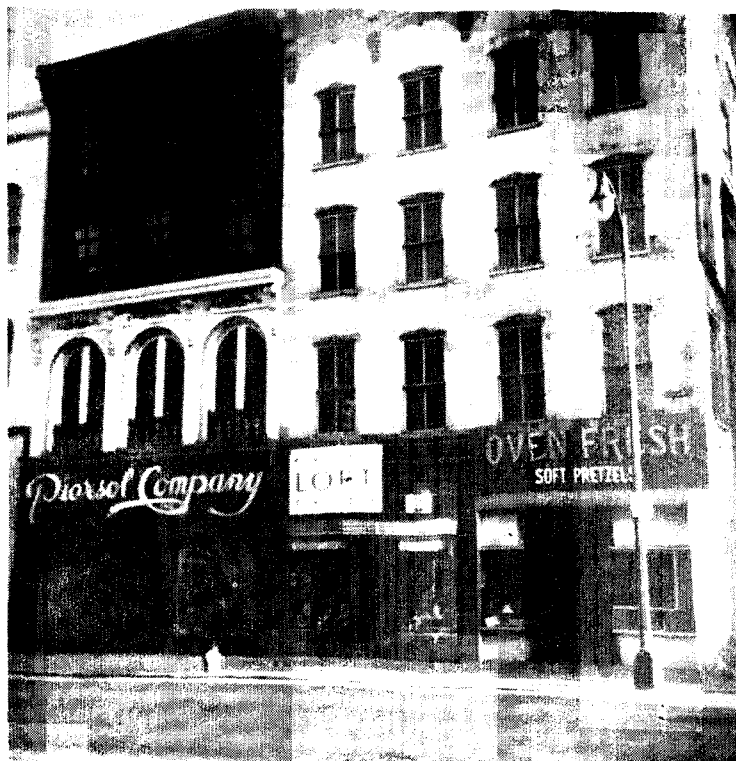
IN THE SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA  
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT  
MAY TERM 1856

John N. Lane, having left a substantial estate, and his brothers and sisters having been deceased, the nephews and nieces had a merry time claiming precedence over one another. Matters had to be settled in the Orphans' Court of Lancaster County, and the appellants and the appellees had for attorneys these prominent members of the Bar: Thos. E. Franklin, Thaddeus Stevens, and Wm. B. Fordney.

The following list of the brothers and sisters of John N. Lane, all deceased, with their descendants, giving their ages as of 1856, is herewith shown.

**The old Lane store building as shown before razing in 1962 (below)**

Photo by author



1. William N. Lane. Issue:  
Clarissa N. Ritchie, 50 years  
Alice T. Taylor, wife of Hubbard B. Taylor, 40 years  
George Taylor Lane, 39 years  
William N. Lane, 37 years  
James S. Lane, 35 years
2. Martha C. Webb. Issue:  
George W. Webb, 55 years  
Edwin Bathhurst Webb, 53 years  
Willoughby L. Webb, 50 years  
John S. Webb, decd., his children—Susan and George W., both minors
3. Willoughby W. Lane. Issue:  
Mary Ann, wife of Andrew Kennedy, 56 years  
Rebecca Hunter, 54 years
4. Sarah N. Carter. Issue:  
Isaac N., 50 years  
Mary F., wife of John Martin, 48 years
5. George S. Lane. Issue:  
Mary Ann Nicklin, 48 years
6. Elliot Tole Lane. Issue:  
James B., 42 years  
Elliot Eskridge, 34 years  
Harriet R., 26 years  
Mary Elizabeth, d

Besides many worthy bequests, James Buchanan did not forget his nephews and nieces, who were:

Harriet Lane Johnston  
J. Buchanan Henry, a son of the Rev. Robert Henry and Harriet Buchanan (1802-1840)  
James B. Lane, grandnephew  
Mary E. Dunham, niece  
Maria B., Jessie, James B., and John B. Weaver, grandnephews and nieces

## TRAGEDY STRIKES

Shortly before the inauguration, President-elect James Buchanan and his friends were entertained at a dinner in a hotel in Washington. Accidentally, or deliberately as some people believed, there was served poisoned food. Could it have been in an effort to harm the President, or did poisoned rats spoil the source of the drinking water? Many were sickened, some died, and among the latter was Elliot Eskridge Lane, a victim of the "National Hotel Epidemic." His death occurred March 26, 1857, and on the 29th funeral services were held at the home of his brother, James B., on North Duke Street. Harriet Lane, sister of the deceased, came from Washington, accompanied by her cousin, James Buchanan Henry, private secretary of the President. Elliot Eskridge was born October 7, 1823, and had become a favorite of the President. Death touched others of

John N. Lane



the family—G. Taylor in 1862, James B. in 1863. The latter's widow, Mrs. Martha Jenkins Lane died at Bellefonte on December 2, 1892, and services were held at the residence of her sister, Mrs. William B. Fordney, 49 East Orange Street. The Lane plot holds these interments:

LANCASTER CEMETERY: on small stones—  
James B. Lane, Martha J. Lane, Dick, Pattie, Nellie, Jennie, Willie, and Mamie.

large shaft—

JOHN N. LANE  
Died Jan. 30, 1856  
aged 79 years  
(b. 1777)

James B. Lane  
born Nov. 16, 1814  
died Jan. 18, 1863

Martha J. Lane  
born June 26, 1820  
died Dec. 2, 1892

G. Taylor Lane  
born May 13, 1815  
died June 6, 1862

Elliot Eskridge Lane  
born Oct. 7, 1823  
died Mar. 26, 1857

The plot is on the first circle of the main avenue.

When Elliot T. Lane died, James Buchanan had words of advice and consolation to the son, Elliot Eskridge, ". . . You ought now seriously to reflect upon & to realize your true condition & you ought to resolve, with the help of God, to act in such a manner as to secure the approbation of your own conscience & of all good men. Your Heavenly Father has promised to be the Orphan's God & he will never abandon you, if you put your trust in Him . . ." Washington, D. C., 12 Dec. 1840.

James B. Lane lived at the northwest corner of North Duke and Marion streets, and bought the property opposite at 125 North Duke Street for \$13,100, on May 28, 1857. This became the home of Samuel H. Reynolds, who married a daughter of William B. Fordney and Ellen Jenkins, the daughter of William Jenkins. This is the home which Eliza E. Smith gave to the City of Lancaster for a public library, May 9, 1898.

### LANE-BUCHANAN FAMILY

Elliott Tole Lane, d. 1841, m. 1813 to Jane Buchanan, sister of James Buchanan. Their children:

James Buchanan, Nov. 16, 1814, Jan. 18, 1863, m. 1845 to

Martha Armor Jenkins, June 26, 1820, Dec. 2, 1892.

Thomas Newton, 1817-1835

Joseph Stark, 1820-1822

Elliot Eskridge, 1823-1857

Mary Elizabeth Speer, 1826-1855, m. 1849 George Washington Baker

Harriet Lane, 1830-1906, m. Henry Elliott Johnston, banker of Baltimore. Sons, James Buchanan and Henry Elliott

William Edward, 1833-1834

Children of James Buchanan Lane and Martha Armor Jenkins:

Jane Buchanan, 1846-1849

William Jenkins, 1848-1849

Mary Harrison, 1850-1851

John Newton, 1852-1930, m. Louisa Sands in 1876

their daughter, Patty Lane, 1880-1946, m. Robert H. Fay in 1901

James Buchanan, 1854-1906, m. 1879 Thomasine Thomas

Patty, 1856-1861

Nellie, 1858-1859

Richard Jenkins, 1860-1862

Elliot Eskridge, 1862-1917

James Buchanan Henry, nephew of the president, had eight sons:

Dr. Reginald B. Henry, b. 1881, of Norfolk, Virginia; Capt. MC USN, and seven others. From Dr. R. B. we have received a complete Buchanan-Lane genealogy.

James B. Lane and George T. Lane were directors of the Lancaster Locomotive Works. George T., rather G. Taylor, was one of the incorporators of the Home for Friendless Children.

Isaac Diller and Samuel Evans Slaymaker were employed as clerks in the 1840s at the John N. Lane store.

## ALLIED WITH PROMINENT LANCASTER FAMILIES

By social, business and marital ties, the Lanes became associated with the leading local families of the Jenkinses, Hubleys, Fordneys and Reynolds.

William Jenkins, builder of Wheatland in 1828, president of the Farmers Bank, studied law in the office of James Hopkins; later James Buchanan studied in the same office. Before Buchanan bought the estate of Wheatland in 1848 from William Morris Meredith, it was owned by Thomas Francis Potter, a trustee of Abbeville Institute, who had married Lydia Hubley Jenkins, a daughter of William Jenkins. Mr. Potter's son, William Hubley Potter, married a daughter of William B. Fordney and wife Ellen Jenkins, a sister of Martha. It was in the office of James Buchanan that Mr. Fordney studied law, and he was admitted to practice at the Lancaster Bar in 1829, and continued for forty years.<sup>5</sup>

Colonel William B. Fordney was born on Chestnut Hill, April 14, 1807, and married Ellen Jenkins on November 1, 1837, the Rev. Samuel Bowman officiating. Their children were:

Mary, 1838-1896, m. Samuel H. Reynolds in 1858; grandparents of Elinora (Mrs. Hugh M. Quigley), of Bellefonte, Pa.

Thomas P. Fordney

William J. Fordney

Ellen m. William H. Potter, April 7, 1863, and had these children:

Ellen Julia, b. 1865, bur. Mar. 2, 1867

Beverly Robinson, b. Aug. 1, 1868

Alice, b. Oct. 5, 1869

William Jenkins was the son of David Jenkins and Martha Armor, the daughter of General Robert A. Armor, of Pequea, Salisbury Township. Mr. Jenkins married Mary Field Hubley, daughter of Colonel Adam Hubley.<sup>6</sup> Of their eleven children one was named James Buchanan; and a daughter, Martha, married James Buchanan Lane. The records of St. James' Episcopal Church reveal the names of most of the children, who were:

Lydia Hubley, b. Nov. 8, 1811, d. Oct. 25, 1841, m. Sept. 11, 1832, to Thomas Francis Potter

Ellen Julia, b. June 23, 1813, m. William B. Fordney

Mary Reed, b. Jan. 17, 1815

William Oswald, b. Dec. 2, 1816, bur. May 4, 1845

Adam Hubley, b. Jan. 1, 1819

Martha Armor, b. June 26, 1820, m. James B. Lane

Richard Stockton, b. May 19, 1822, d. Sept. 5, 1823

Robert Emmet, b. Mar. 3, 1824

Ann Rosina, b. Jan. 27, 1826, m. James W. Blatchford, Apr. 6, 1858

James Buchanan, b. Aug. 21, 1828, d. Sept. 10, 1861

Catherine Carmichael, b. Oct. 8, 1830, bur. Sept. 12, 1861

Richard Stockton, b. Oct. 14, 1832, bapt. Nov. 5, 1836

## THE REDOUBTABLE HARRIET LANE

Harriet Rebecca Lane, daughter of Elliot T. Lane and wife Jane Buchanan (sister of President James Buchanan), was born May 9, 1830, at Mercersburg, Pa., in the home later known as the Waidlich House on Main Street. She was doubly orphaned at the age of eleven years, and so became the ward of her distinguished uncle. Perhaps at times annoying as a small child, yet as she grew into womanhood with grace, and charm and talent, her bachelor uncle could feel himself fortunate to have her as constant companion during his political service at points in Europe, and as the beautiful hostess and social leader as First Lady in the White House. In her youth she attended Mrs. Young's school, a merry, mischievous girl, never so happy as when ringleader of schoolgirl pranks. "In all the counties of Southern Pennsylvania there was no comelier and more high-spirited maiden."<sup>7</sup> This same vivaciousness carried through to the White House, and on one occasion she "commandeered" the cutter **Harriet Lane** for a pleasure jaunt to West Point. Of course the newspapers of the day criticised her, and her uncle upbraided her for the unwarranted use of government service and property.

Let me give you an appraisal of Harriet, now fifteen years old, by her school teacher, to her elder brother, James B. Lane:

Charles Town, Oct. 15, 1845

I wish to consult you with regard to yr Sister Harriet. She has just recovered from the unusual dissipation of thought caused by the last vacation, and after much serious admonition, is once more interested in her studies; but unfortunately Mrs. Hunter has offered to take Harriet with her to Lancaster, and having yr permission, she is preparing for a visit which will again interrupt, for a while at least, all idea of books, etc. . . . If Harriet is called away again I shall have the same irksome task to perform when she returns. . . . You are perfectly acquainted with Harriet's peculiarity of temper, and must know that indulgence is subversive of all discipline where she is concerned. . . . Harriet is at this moment looking forward to a visit which she expects to pay her Uncle James during Christmas week, at which time she expects to meet young ladies and gentlemen; one of the latter, with whom she formed a casual acquaintance at Bedford Springs, begged the favor of her correspondence. . . . She seems perfectly happy, and gives me much satisfaction in the schoolroom; her mind is greatly strengthened and improved, and she overcomes difficulties which daily occur in some of her studies with a degree of facility which at times surprises me. She seems particularly interested in the study of the French language. . . . I really am deeply interested for Harriet, and sincerely desire to see her an attractive and amiable woman. Such I think, she will be with proper training and wholesome restraint.

Respectfully your friend,

Mary E. Merritt

But by October 4, 1855, we find a letter with a different trend, written by Uncle James from the Legation of the United States in London to his nephew Eskridge:

Harriet has been an expensive article to me in England, but of this I do not complain, because she has conducted herself much to my satisfaction and her company has been very Agreeable . . . It is my intention hereafter to allow her \$180 per annum, so as to make her income \$600.

Yours affectionately, James Buchanan

P.S. I send this letter by General Thomas for greater security.



**Harriet Lane Johnston (1830-1903) Painted in 1899.**

Photo Courtesy of A. Aubrey Bodine



Surgeon General Foltz shows us the self-assertiveness of Harriet Lane when he tells us "there had been a tiff between Miss Lane and her uncle, who had intimated that she was there as his housekeeper. 'Oh, no,' she insisted, 'I am here as the lady of the White House,' and when he did not instantly assent to that she added that if that was not to be her position she would leave at once. She ordered her trunks brought down and that was being done when the President, with apologies, told her that it should be as she wished, but he had to beg her to remain as 'the lady of the White House,' a position which she filled most graciously."<sup>8</sup>

Beautiful as Miss Lane was, some newspapers grudgingly and charily described her early in 1858 as did the reporter in the **St. Louis News**:<sup>9</sup> "She is a handsome lady, twenty-five or twenty-six years old, apparently. She has a healthy, ruddy, Pennsylvania look. Not **distingue** by any means, but eminently **satisfactory** to the eye. She has a superb **head**, that noblest and most necessary part of the human frame. Not a literary head, or a poetical head, but a **sensible** head, covered with heavy and beautiful chestnut hair."

A pleasant recollection, frequently recalled by our late member, the venerable William A. Heinitsh, was his visit when nine years old (in 1865) to Wheatland, where he presented a bouquet of flowers to Miss Lane, and graciously received in return lemonade and ginger cakes. He lived to cherish the memory for more than eighty-eight years. (William A., son of William Edward, was the grandson of John Frederick Heinitsh, who bought of James Buchanan his city home at 19 East King Street.)

Miss Lane was married January 11, 1866, at Wheatland, to Henry Elliot Johnston, a wealthy banker of Baltimore. Overwhelming grief entered their happy but short married life. Their two sons passed away in early youth, James in 1881, and Henry in 1882. Two years later she suffered the loss of her husband. The loss of her sons engendered in her a concern for unfortunate children, and so she provided for the erection and maintenance of The Harriet Lane Johnston Home<sup>10</sup> for Invalid Children, at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland. The inscription on the building reads:

"In memory of the Founder of this Home,  
Harriet Lane Johnston  
and of her husband  
Henry Elliot Johnston  
and her two sons,  
James Buchanan and Henry Elliot Johnston, Jr.  
And in perpetual witness of the love and  
sorrow of the wife and mother, which  
Quickened and deepened her devotion to the  
Relief of the Sufferings of Childhood"

In The Cathedral Age for 1951 there appeared this beautiful tribute to Harriet Lane Johnston:

Erected on the west side of the Washington Cathedral Close, St. Albans School was founded in 1904 through the bequest of Harriet Lane Johnston as a memorial to her two sons. Half of her legacy saw the construction of the Lane Johnston Building which houses dormitories, the

refectory, upper school study hall, and class rooms. Twenty Lane Johnston scholarships for Cathedral choristers and two crucifers are partially provided for by the income of the other half.

Statuesque, with blonde hair and deep blue eyes, Harriet was considered one of the great beauties of her day. Her charm was internationally celebrated. When Buchanan was United States Minister to England, Harriet joined him there and at the time it was said that Queen Victoria honored her more than any other foreign woman. The song, "Listen to the Mocking Bird," was dedicated to her.

Harriet's deep religious faith must have served her well in the many sorrows of her lifetime. A loyal member of St. James' Church, her devoutness is apparent from the greatly worn condition of the petit-point prie-dieu which still stands at the foot of the bed in her room at Wheatland. It was not until two years after her return to Wheatland from the White House that she was confirmed in the Episcopal Church at Oxford in Philadelphia, where her uncle, the Rev. Edward Y. Buchanan, was the rector.

Harriet Lane Johnston was married at Wheatland, January 11, 1866, to Henry E. Johnston, of Baltimore. Her marriage was exceptionally happy though tragically short-lived.

Two sons were born to the Johnstons. The first was named after Harriet's uncle, the second after her husband. The first time that sorrow was to strike, it singled out the elder son. At only fifteen years of age, he died in Baltimore. Of this tragedy, Judge Jeremiah S. Black of Lancaster wrote, "I have just returned from the funeral of James Buchanan Johnston, affected by a deeper sense of bereavement than any death outside my own immediate family has caused me in many years. The overwhelming grief of that beloved mother and the awful break-down of the proud father's spirit cannot even be thought of without strong emotion."

As a memorial to their first son, Mrs. Johnston and her husband gave St. James' Church two windows. The lower window depicts Christ in the temple, surrounded by the venerable doctors. Jesus is in the center of the group, "both hearing them and asking them questions."

Of the second and upper window in this gift, it is said that the face of the Archangel Michael follows the features of the Johnstons' sons. An oil painting of the two boys which hangs on a bedroom wall in Wheatland bears out this belief. The stained glass in this window shows beauty in its depth of colors, particularly in the ruby tones and the multi-colors of the angel's wings.

It was in rapid succession that tragedy again entered Harriet Lane Johnston's life. One year after the death of her son James, the second son, Henry, died. Then just two years later, in 1884, she lost her husband. On the walls of St. James' Church a large tablet is inscribed to her husband and son. Bereft of her husband and children. Mrs. Johnston spent a lonely widowhood, returning to Wheatland each summer until the estate was sold.<sup>11</sup>

To this day you can travel through our land from Virginia to California, and find descendants of these nephews and nieces filling honorable and conspicuous places.

## WALKING CANES

Canes which had been used by James Buchanan, were given to  
Rev. Edward Y. Buchanan  
Harriet Lane Johnston  
James Buchanan Johnston  
James Buchanan  
William Buchanan  
J. Buchanan Henry  
James B. Lane  
Elliot E. Lane  
Charles Dunham  
James B. Weaver  
John B. Weaver  
H. B. Swarr  
Henry Elliot Johnston  
Henry Dunham

September 1, 1869

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## NOTES

1. Old Lancaster—Tales and Traditions, by William Frederic Worner, p. 197, Lancaster, 1927.
2. A Biographical History of Lancaster County, by Alex. Harris, Lancaster, 1872.
3. Orphans Court Docket, 1855-1856, p. 713, August 19, 1856, Lancaster County Courthouse.
4. Ibid, p. 602.
5. Portrait and Biographical Record, Chapman Pub. Co., Chicago, 1894, p. 492.
6. Papers Lancaster County Historical Society, vol. 40, p. 66.
7. Old Mercersburg, pp. 35, 81, 82.
8. "Surgeon of the Seas," life story of Surgeon General Jonathan Messersmith Foltz, edited by Charles S. Foltz, p. 186.
9. As reprinted in the Lancaster Daily Express, Jan. 27, 1858.
10. Morton McNutt Prentis, brother of Henning W. Prentis, Jr., of Lancaster, was a trustee of the Home.
11. The Cathedral Age, 1951, written by Jean E. Thompson.