

Unpublished Letters of James Buchanan

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

AT A meeting of the Lancaster County Historical Society held on Friday evening, January 6th, 1928, attention was re-called that James Buchanan, Lancaster county's most distinguished citizen, and the only son of Pennsylvania to achieve the highest position in the land, that of the Presidency of the United States, died at his home, Wheatland, near Lancaster city, on June 1st, 1868, sixty years ago. Prof. Herbert H. Beck, president of the Society, suggested that 1928 be officially designated as "Buchanan Year." A bronze statue of Buchanan was erected to-day in the city park that bears his name. Funds for this laudable purpose were provided by the late Dulon F. Buchmiller, in his will. Wheatland, formerly the home of Mr. Buchanan, is to be officially marked by a handsome tablet, presented by Mr. George B. Willson, the present owner and occupant of that historic homestead. The memory of the fifteenth President of the United States will be perpetuated by a marble and bronze memorial in Washington, D. C., which will, in all probability, be unveiled during this year.

Since these three events of outstanding importance are to be observed during 1928, when the attention of the public in general will be directed to Pennsylvania's most distinguished son, it seems eminently fitting and proper to bring to light certain information not generally known about this illustrious statesman. Carefully preserved in the archives of the Lancaster County Historical Society are a number of letters, in the handwriting of James Buchanan, addressed, with but one exception, to citizens of old Lancaster business associates and friends of the President. These letters, so far as is known, have never been published, and do not appear in John Bassett Moore's comprehensive edition of "The Works of James Buchanan," in twelve volumes, published in 1908, by the J. B. Lippincott Company of Philadelphia and London.

The letters are as follows:

Washington 18 Jan: 1828.

Dear Sir/

I return you the affidavits & certificate in the case of Catharine Mitchell. The names of the two children who are the heirs at law of John Mitchell must be stated both in the affidavit of the widow & the witnesses. As he was enlisted by the name of John Mitchell & not John A Mitchell—the former name had better be used.

Some time since Mr. Reigart sent me 6 doz: of wine. As it was not all for myself I would thank you to call upon him & get him to make out a regular Bill which you will please to send me. I wish him to include in it the carriage of the wine to Baltimore.

In regard to John Lightner. I shall write to you as soon as I know what time I shall visit Lancaster. As soon as I give you this information, I would thank you to inform him in a polite letter that I shall issue a *Liberum Facias* against him at that time should not the money be paid.

In all my cases on the list for the first Monday of February, I believe other Counsel are concerned unless it be the case of Lawrence. v. Eby. I do not remember this case. If other Counsel should be concerned in it, inform him immediately that I shall not be at home; and that I do not wish the cause [case] continued on account of my absense. If not write to Mr. Eby to come to Lancaster & employ other counsel.

On the list for the second week are the 2 cases of Slaymaker. v. Boyd. & Frey & Hambright v. Muma. W. Porter is concerned in them & I therefore I presume they will not be tried. If such be the understanding, get Mr. Bachman to mark them continued. The same may be observed in regard to the cases of Wilton & Noel. v. Counce. Please to write to me immediately whether these causes will be continued as they are of importance.

3d Week. The cases of Stoughton. v. McCalls Ferry Bridge Company will I presume be continued by Mr. Evans; as there is a case pending in the Circuit Court which will decide them finally. I thought the case of Stoner & Shenk—had been tried since I left Lancaster. How is this? I want you to inform Henry Ream by letter that his cause is down for trial—that I shall not be in Lancaster—& if he wishes to employ any other Counsel to assist Mr. Rogers—he ought to do it immediately.

4 week. I believe W. Jenkins is concerned in Taggert. v. Eby & Kling.

I was about to request you to go out to Mr. Barr but upon re-examining your letter I presume there is no doubt but my money will be paid on the 1st April & I shall make arrangements accordingly.

I am much pleased to hear any thing from Lancaster. I hope you will continue to give me the news.

from your friend

James Buchanan

Mr. William B. Fordney.

Col. William B. Fordney was born on Chestnut Hill, Lancaster county, Pa., April 14th, 1807. He read law with James Buchanan and was admitted to the Lancaster bar in 1829. He received his military title from Governor Wolf, under whom he served. After his admission to the practice of the law in Lancaster his superior abilities soon gave him a front rank in the profession which at that time contained many legal lights. He died in July, 1889. The foregoing letter was written to him while he was yet a law student. Mr. Buchanan had been elected to Congress in 1820, and served through five terms.

Washington 19 December 1836.

My dear Sir/

Accept my thanks for your kind letter of the 9th Instant & for your active & efficient exertions in my favor. I have now obtained the only distinction [United States senator] which I desire; and that in a manner the most grateful to my feelings. I trust that I may be able by my conduct to justify the generous confidence reposed in me by the Democratic party.

I had intended to visit Lancaster & Harrisburg during the holidays; but the navigation, I presume, is now closed, & during that period the stages are very much crowded & very disagreeable between Baltimore & Columbia. Besides, I suppose you will adjourn during the holidays.

The President's [Andrew Jackson] health still continues to improve.

Please to remember me to Gardner Furniss, W. Patterson & my other friends whom you may meet in Lancaster county & believe me always to be sincerely your friend.

James Buchanan

James A. Caldwell Esq

Washington 20 Jan: 1837.

My dear Sir/

I thank you for your kind letter & have only to regret that I am so much occupied at the present moment that I have only time to indorse the note & return it to you.

Ever your friend
James Buchanan

William B. Fordney Esq

Washington 19 February 1840

My dear Sir/

I have received a letter from Judge Hayes which I consider it best to enclose to you, although it was evidently not written with that intention. I think the reasons which he urges are very strong for placing him in the same situation in regard to salary with the district Judges of Pittsburg. You will take the case into consideration & after weighing all the facts & circumstances I know will come to an honest & conscientious conclusion. Should this be favorable to the Judge I shall be grateful. Please to keep the letter which is intended by me for your own perusal only & return it to me at your convenience.

Ever your friend
James Buchanan

James A. Caldwell Esq

The following letter was written, in all probability, in the autumn of 1847. Apparently envelopes were not then in use. The letter was folded and sealed, and the postmark on it reads: "Washington City, D. C. Oct. 6." The first part of the letter is missing including the heading, date and salutation. This was probably torn off by some one after it had been received. The letter is as follows:

Private

My dear Sir/

In April 1846 I made an investment of \$4000, the interest of which it was then & still is my purpose to devote perpetually to the purchase of wood & coal for the use of poor widows & single women during the winter season. I have often witnessed much distress for want of fuel among this helpless class of our community: & I had long since determined to appropriate a fund for their relief.

When at home last spring I received one years interest on this investment which is now in my hands.

I had fully intended to visit Lancaster this fall for the purpose of placing this charity upon a permanent & secure footing. I now begin to apprehend, however, that the pressure of public business may prevent me from accomplishing this object before the next spring: and as the time is at hand for the purchase of the wood & coal, I have determined to send you a check for the amount. Knowing your benevolent disposition I feel confident you will, as Mayor of the City, cheerfully undertake this business. In the mean time, it is my special desire that you should say nothing as to the source from which the money proceeds. Please to drop me a line upon this subject & believe me

to be sincerely & respectfully
your friend

James Buchanan

Michael Carpenter Esquire

Michael Carpenter was born in Warwick township, Lancaster county, Pa., September 22nd, 1796. In 1807 he moved to Lancaster with his parents. By profession he was a scrivener. In 1843 he was elected Mayor of the city of Lancaster, and, by successive re-elections, continued to fill this office up to 1852. His death occurred on August 5th, 1861.

Wheatland, near Lancaster 6 July 1853.

My dear Sir/

I have received your favor of the 10th & 14th ultimo; & thank you cordially for your kind invitation to make your house my home on my arrival at London. There, I know, from past experience, I should feel at home. I regret to say, however, that although fully prepared myself, I shall not be able to leave in the Baltic on the 9th, as I had intended. Doubtless the Department has written or will write you on the subject, as it is of great importance that you should not leave until a new Minister shall arrive. This would be rendered more embarrassing as the Secretary of Legation has returned home.

I would cheerfully write you the news; but have nothing of the least importance to communicate, except what you will see in the Public Journals.

I shall write you again the moment the time of my departure shall be fixed.

With sentiments of sincere & grateful regard, I remain
your friend

James Buchanan

7 July. It is now quite uncertain whether I shall go as Minister to England, as there is a fair prospect of settling the disputed questions in this country. His Excellency.

Joseph R Ingersoll

In this year Mr. Buchanan was appointed Minister to Great Britain by President Pierce.

Washington 13th June 1857.

My dear Sir/

I need not say I have a sincere desire to oblige you & have accordingly requested the Secretary of War to find a place for your nephew. The result has been the enclosed letter to me from Captain Meigs which you will please to return. If you think well of it you can address to Captain Meigs the letter which he suggests. If not, I will look out for some other place for him.

I shall, unexpectedly, have in funds on the 1 July \$5000, & I would loan this money secured by a good mortgage in Lancaster county. If you know of such an opportunity, please to inform me. In haste,

ever your friend

James Buchanan

William Carpenter Esq

William Carpenter was, for many years, the best known surveyor, scrivener and conveyancer of Lancaster county. He also served as prothonotary of the county. An old neighbor and personal friend of James Buchanan, he acted as pall-bearer at the funeral of the distinguished statesman. Mr. Carpenter died in 1875.

Washington 4 July 1857

My dear Sir/

I enclose you a draft for \$5000 on the Philadelphia Bank. If W. Killinger will mortgage the property you suggested & make the loan for three years, please to proceed & complete the business & I shall be pleased with it. If not, I care but little as good public loans are now selling at such a reduced price.

With my kind remembrance to all friends, I remain truly yours

James Buchanan

William Carpenter Esq.

P. S. It would be convenient to make the interest payable on the 1 April & the principal on the 1 April 1860 or 1861. I wish you would inform our friend Koenigmacher that I shall expect the payment of \$2500 on the 1 April next or as much more as may be convenient.

Mr. Buchanan was at this time President of the United States.

Washington 11 July 1857

My dear Sir/

I wrote you some days ago & enclosed a draft for \$5000 in my favor drawn by Messrs Reggs & Co on (I believe) the Philadelphia Bank. As its receipt has not been acknowledged I begin to fear that it has miscarried.

In haste, I remain your friend.

James Buchanan

William Carpenter Esq

Washington 24 May 1859.

My dear Sir/

I have received yours of yesterday. I have re-examined all the papers in my tin box & do not find the Konigmacher mortgage. I do not recollect that I ever saw it after it was executed, though this is no proof that I did not. Have you inquired for it at the Recorder's office? If you do not find it there, you might go out to Wheatland & Miss Harriet [Harriet Lane, Buchanan's niece] will give you the key of my desk in the library. You might see whether it is there or in any of the table drawers. You know that I went to England soon after the execution of the mortgage & it may not have been recorded before my departure.

But if the mortgage should not be found,—what of that? It has been recorded & can be assigned on a separate paper just as well as by indorsement on the mortgage.

You can see to whom the mortgage was delivered by the Recorder, in case you should not find it in his office & this will be a clew.

from your friend

very respectfully

James Buchanan

William Carpenter Esquire

P. S. W. I. L. Reynolds, who, with poor Ekridge, was my agent when last abroad, as his good father had been when I was in Russia might possibly know something about it.

Washington 13 September 1860.

My dear Sir/

I send you the Mortgage etc. Perhaps you had better have the assignment recorded. I observe the omission of [the] word **dollars**, after Three Thousand; but it is not material. If I knew a good place in Lancaster County I could lend some more money there.

Mr. Baker in writing to me yesterday says he had sent you the policy of Insurance in the Lancaster County Mutual Insurance Co. & if I desire an assignment of the Policy this will be made. I leave it all to you, though it would seem not to be necessary. Do as you please & I shall be content.

Private

Some knave or fool got up a lie from the whole cloth & it was telegraphed over the country that I was about to purchase or had purchased a place somewhere else & would not return to Wheatland. If my successor should be as happy in entering the White House as I shall feel on returning to Wheatland he will indeed be a happy man. I am just now in my own mind chalking out the course of my last message. In it, should Providence continue his blessing, I shall have nothing to record but uninterrupted success for my country. The trouble about the slavery question would all have been avoided, had the Country submitted to the decision of the Supreme Court delivered two or three days after my inaugural. To this all law abiding men will come in less than one year. Meanwhile I know I have lost political friends in Lancaster for sustaining the empire of the Constitution & the laws as expounded by the Co-ordinate Judicial Branch of the Government; but all will yet be well.

Your friend always

James Buchanan

William Carpenter Esquire

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In the proceedings of the Lancaster County Historical Society for May, 1928, Vol. XXXII, pages 67-72, appear a number of letters written by James Buchanan of Lancaster, fifteenth President of the United States. Shortly after these documents were published, the Society received commendatory letters from historical societies, colleges and universities for bringing this valuable material to the attention of the general public. Other letters written by James Buchanan, now in possession of citizens of this community and elsewhere, and which throw interesting side-lights on the life and character of this distinguished statesman, have been submitted to the Society, and are herewith published in order to make them available for students of research, and others.

These letters, so far as known, have never appeared in print. They do not appear in John Bassett Moore's comprehensive edition of "The Works of James Buchanan," in twelve volumes, published in 1908, by the J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia and London.

The Society gladly welcomes all such letters and other historical documents, either as a gift or for publication, where the way is clear.

The Pennsylvania State Library owns three original letters of James Buchanan, which are as follows:

Washington, 12 December 1829

Dear Sir /

Justice to myself compels me to address you a few lines. I perform this duty, with no other personal view, but that of holding the place in your opinion which I know I deserve.

Since the famous meeting in Lancaster, at which I anticipated no disturbance, & which I attended for the single purpose of uniting not of dividing the party, as my preamble and resolutions abundantly testify, I have become the object of unceasing attack, in one of the Lancaster papers. I confess I think my case a very hard one. Having actively supported not only your election, but that of the whole county ticket having both written & spoken of you upon all occasions in the terms which I knew you deserved, I find myself now denounced as if I had been your cold friend, if not your enemy. I now address you for the purpose of removing any impressions from your mind which may have been made by these publications; and to inform you that as I always warmly supported your election, it is my determination firmly to sustain your administration.

The Paper to which I have alluded has also endeavored to create a hostile feeling between General M'Kean & myself; by endeavoring to make me responsible for a remark in the Lancaster Journal of which I knew as little as you did, until I saw that paper in this City. As one of your friends, I recognize your entire right to make your own selection of a Secretary. No man can with truth say aught against the character of General M'Kean. He & I have long been personal friends, unless his mind has recently been poisoned against me. I had a wish, in common with some others, that your first officer should have been selected from the West; but you have determined otherwise, & I shall acquiesce with cheerfulness.

Having long since announced my determination to retire from Congress

at the close of the present term, I have no interest but the good of the country & the party in desiring to save the District which I now in part represent, from the grasp of Anti-masonry. This can be done, only by a thorough union & pre-concerted action of your friends, under the name of democrats. There are in truth but two parties now in Pennsylvania—the Anti-masonic & the democratic. Between these parties, I know not how any federalist who supported General Jackson & who advocates the principles to which he owes his election can hesitate in making a choice. In our Congressional District we are destined to have a fearful struggle & union is absolutely necessary to our success. Nothing shall be wanting on my part to promote a reconciliation of your friends, provided I can interfere with any reasonable hope of accomplishing a purpose so desirable.

I never saw General Jackson's health appear so robust as it does at present.

I shall wait with some anxiety to learn—whether my enemies have made any impression against me on your mind. I want nothing from you but your good opinion which I am conscious of deserving & shall be proud of retaining.

Wishing that your administration may be prosperous & happy, I remain

Your friend

His Excellency George Wolf.

James Buchanan

George Wolf served as Governor of Pennsylvania from December 15th, 1829, to December 15th, 1835. The above letter was written three days before his inauguration. Andrew Jackson was then President of the United States.

Lancaster 28 March 1835

My dear Sir /

It is generally believed, with what truth I know not, that Judge Barnes will not be re-appointed President of the District Court of Philadelphia. In that event, I would earnestly recommend the appointment of Mr. Kittera as his successor. I know not whether he would accept the office; but from circumstances I believe he would, though he is one of that class of men who will never apply for it.

I have known Mr. K. long & known him well. So far as my opinion is entitled to any weight, I believe he would make as able a Judge as any lawyer in Philadelphia not excepting either Mr. Binney or Mr. Sergeant. His practice is now very extensive & very lucrative: and this is always the best evidence of the merits of a lawyer. Besides he is one of the most amiable, honorable & kind hearted men I have ever known; and I believe his appointment would give universal satisfaction.—But I believe you are well acquainted with him yourself.

In his politicks he has always been firm & decided, though never violent or proscriptive. To my knowledge he has been a uniform friend of the General & State administrations & has always spoken of you in the terms which your friends could have desired. Indeed I feel very anxious that this appointment should be offered to him.

For some time past I have been intending to pay Harrisburg a visit. I hope to be able to do so immediately after the first of April, if not sooner.

From your friend with great
respect

His Excellency George Wolf.

James Buchanan

My dear Sir,

I have been quite sick since I received your letter; and this is the only reason why I did not give it an immediate answer. I am sorry I am not able to write to you at length on the subject.

I should be extremely sorry, if the gentlemen who signed the Memorial of the last year should insist upon my bringing the subject before Congress at the present Session. It would then appear like a movement of the Democratic party of Pennsylvania in favor of appropriating the public money in aid of the colonization Society. Such an attempt, at this moment, from such a quarter, would only injure the cause & produce an excitement on the subject of slavery which may be productive of the most injurious consequences. It would separate the Democracy of Pennsylvania from that of the other States & produce the greatest embarrassment to the new administration. — Colonization was popular in several of the Southern States, before the abolition excitement commenced. It has now but few friends in that quarter; and a vast majority of the people are bitterly hostile to it.

The appropriation of public money to this purpose has always been considered unconstitutional by a large majority of the Democratic party, whether friends or foes of colonization. Where is the power? Under which of the specific powers of Congress is it embraced? I really ask for information.

If some of us have voted appropriations for internal improvements, the constitution authorizes Congress to establish Post offices & Post Roads, & to regulate commerce among the several States &c.

The advocates of a Bank of the U. S. find this power in the clause to levy & collect taxes — &c &c.

Upon what granted power will you hang that to appropriate money for the purpose of sending colonists to Africa? My mind is open to conviction.

If the colonization societies send such petitions, well & good. I should be sorry they would proceed from the fountain of Democracy.

If you insist upon it, I shall obey the will of the gentlemen who signed the former petition. If I can get the Senate to refer it, it will go to the Judiciary Committee, who will certainly report that Congress have no power over the question.

Please to let me hear from you soon; & believe me ever to be sincerely your friend,

James Buchanan

Ovid F. Johnston Esq

P. S. If these colonization petitions come here they will just produce as great an excitement, at the present moment, as abolition petitions. This is the last thing on earth, we the friends of colonization ought to desire. Many of the worthy men of the South, highly excited by the movements of the abolitionists, cannot & will not now distinguish between a movement upon the slavery question coming from agitators or pacificators. Is it wise then for the Dem: party, by making an inopportune movement, to incur the hazard of being confounded, in the great public mind, with those whom we, with the whole South, consider unwise agitators? I write in haste.

The National Colonization Society was organized in 1816, for the purpose of promoting "a plan for colonizing (with their consent) the free people of color residing in our country, in Africa, or such other place as Congress may deem most expedient." Branches were established throughout the country.

Mrs. Clifford Gray Twombly, wife of the Rector of Saint James's Protestant Episcopal Church, Lancaster, has two intimate and personal letters written by James Buchanan to her father, the Rev. Dr. Lewis P. W. Balch, who at the time the letters were addressed to him was Rector of Emanuel Protestant Episcopal Church, Newport, R. I. These letters were written during the summer following Mr. Buchanan's retirement from the office of President.

They are as follows:

Wheatland, near Lancaster
10 August 1861.

My dear Sir /

I have received your very kind invitation to pay you a visit at New Port. This is not a mere formal invitation; but from the style & tone in which it is conveyed it evidently proceeds from the heart. For this flattering token of regard from a gentleman whom I so highly esteem, please to accept my grateful thanks. I know not at the present moment whether I can accept it: & cannot say for a fortnight. As this is quite uncertain, it would render me unhappy to learn that you had on my account withheld the privileges of a visit to your hospitable mansion from any other friend. In any event, I should gladly meet Bishop Potter. Miss Lane, who is very partial to England, would be delighted with the opportunity of meeting Mrs. Balch as well as yourself.

I am now almost, if not altogether, convalescent after a long & severe illness; although my strength returns very slowly.

Many thanks for the opinion you express that my character will be better appreciated by future generations than the present. I venture the assertion that the present generation will do me justice as soon as my conduct shall be presented in its true light from official documents. In reviewing all that I have done since the election of Mr. Lincoln I would not recall a single act. I rely upon an over-ruling Providence to scatter the mists of prejudice which now obscure my public conduct.

With my kindest regards & those of Miss Lane for Mrs. Balch & yourself, I remain

Very respectfully
Your friend

James Buchanan

Rev: Dr. Balch.

Wheatland, near Lancaster
31 August 1861.

My dear & Rev: Sir /

I have received your very kind favor of the 29th & deeply regret to say that, under existing circumstances, it is quite impossible for me to leave home. When I wrote you last, both Miss Lane & myself anticipated, with great pleasure, that we might be able to accomplish that which we so much desired; but my continued presence here for private & public reasons, is indispensable. I shall ever cherish in grateful remembrance your kind invitation & remain very respectfully your friend.

James Buchanan

Rev: Dr. Balch.

P. S. Miss Lane desires me to present kindest regards to Mrs. Balch & yourself & I heartily unite with her in my best respects to your lady.