



James Buchanan



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**JAMES BUCHANAN, THE SQUIRE FROM LANCASTER**

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THE SQUIRE'S HOME TOWN

There are few towns of more historic interest than Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Not only has it been the scene of important events in the early history of the country, but it has numbered among its inhabitants numerous persons of note and attainment.

The good town had its famous men and it has also had the good fortune to have had local historians who have carefully recorded its annals.<sup>1</sup> In this short sketch of Buchanan's home town there is no attempt made to dwell upon the city or its institutions, but rather to supply a few word pictures of Lancaster in the fifties and sixties, and to trace briefly the relations of Buchanan with his fellow townsmen. The sketches of the town are from the pens of foreigners, newspapermen whose purpose was to be vivid and perchance, if necessity demanded, to be interesting at a small expense to sterner facts. It was June in 1856. The correspondent of the *Herald* wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Among its present researchers in historic lore are Mrs. Bertha M. Landis and William Frederick Worner.

Lancaster, Pa. June 24, 1856.

The city of Buchanan is a good type of old-fashioned inland towns. It depends almost entirely upon the trade of the farming population of the very rich agricultural region around it, and hence the business part of the place is made up of retail stores for the sale of innumerable commodities, sprinkled with places of refreshment and restauration for outsiders and the resident population. The town is situated upon a high, airy location, and looking down the vista of any of the principal streets, the view is lost in the blue haze, where vision yields to the power of distance. The buildings are low, with a few upstart exceptions, which are regarded as innovations upon the original Dutch plan. The only pretension to style in the dwellings is in the white doorcasings and window shutters, copied from Philadelphia architecture. The main business street, running north and south (Queen Street), is crossed at right angles by other streets at distant intervals, and there are but one or two thoroughfares parallel with it on either side. There are but few cross streets, and hence the plan of the town is very simple. The signs bear an abundance of queer names. Mrs. Budd keeps a full blown millinery establishment; Mr. Andrew Bear keeps a tavern, and Adam Trout another; Mr. Frick is proprietor of an oyster saloon, and Jacob Christ manufactures furniture. Wonder if this last ever made a Presidential chair.

As the shades of evening approach, the fellow townsmen of Mr. Buchanan give themselves up to enjoyment. The best hearth rug is brought out from the parlor and spread upon the front door steps, and the head of the family lounges there in dishabille, surrounded by his "numerous wife and children." Philo-progenitiveness is one of the idiosyncrasies of the Lancasterians. Such hordes of small children I never saw in any Irish quarter of any city as they are to be seen around the doorsteps of the dwellings in this place at twilight. Where they all come from is a mystery which it would puzzle "James Buchanan" himself to solve. Then, throughout the early evening, the pretty Lancasterian girls promenaded the streets in pairs, triplets and troops. They laugh and chat gaily, and look with boldness of innocence upon the tavern loungers in front of Michael's and the other hostelrys scattered along the main street. They are mostly without hats, having ascertained that it is an easy step from the latest fashioned bonnet to bareheadedness, and with a noble impartiality they resolve to expose their phrenological bumps to the evening air all alike. It is very pleasant to sit at the door and watch the panorama of living beauty moving past.

Lancaster awakes, or is awakened, early in the morning. At 5 o'clock, the biggest bell in town is rung furiously, as if Lancaster were on fire, or the news of Buchanan's nomination had been just received. At 6 o'clock, the operation is repeated, and

the bell continues to break out hourly with its ding-dong (ap) peals to the drowsy portion of the citizens till 9 o'clock. In the meantime, the milkmen, who have, seemingly, no trace of bronchial weakness, keep up an infernal tooting with tin horns, so that, in due course of time, Mr. Buchanan's fellow citizens are thoroughly aroused from "death's counterfeit" to look after their affairs. Business jogs along at the same moderate, old fashioned gait in which the highly respectable democratic nominee will jog towards the White House. The farmers are purchasing a few rakes and gallons of whiskey and molasses for the haying season; but trade is generally quite slow and Lancasterian.

There is no political excitement in this burgh, and one rarely hears the Presidential question discussed. This morning, however, a couple of "staunch Germans of Pennsylvania" came in to refresh themselves with beer, and indulged in a bout of politics. They were apparently well-to-do farmers. "What you thinks pout Pukanan, Mr. Snider," asked one. "Oh, I pretty much dinks I can't voke for him." "Why not, Mr. Snider?" "Well, I don't like this man Bierce, ant Pukanan will pe as pad as him on the platform." "Take care, Mr. Snider—you can't lay down in that proad republican pet mit niggers, and Know Nottings, ant everything else, I can tell you. You must get sick of that. I vas sucked in py'em six months, ant I know 'em. I shall not dake one tousant tollars for what I learned apout 'em. No, No, Mr. Snider, you must go for Pukanan."

The Lancasterians have a large stone court house, where justice is "dispensed with" in a great hall, draped with crimson damask. There is a rag carpet on the floor, and the Court has issued printed regulations forbidding in the most positive terms, Mr. Buchanan's fellow citizens to spit on the floor, sit with their feet higher than their heads, or eat "peanuts, almonds, chestnuts, or other nuts or fruit" on the premises. I stepped into this legal sanctuary today, and found, among others, Mr. Thaddeus Stevens, the gentleman who lugubriously predicted, at the Philadelphia Convention, that Pennsylvania would give 50,000 majority for Buchanan, because McLean was not nominated, arguing knotty points of law before the bench of the Court of Common Pleas. Mr. Stevens is said to be a better lawyer than politician.<sup>2</sup>

Another account, written about the same time, runs as follows:

Lancaster is sixty-eight miles west of Philadelphia, and we can go there in three hours. We disburse fourteen York shillings for a ticket, and are horse powered up Market Street in a slow,

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<sup>2</sup> *New York Herald*, June 27, 1856.

respectable, Philadelphia-like manner. We scour rapidly over a pleasant country, here and there disclosing traces of those mineral deposits for which Pennsylvania is so famous, and we are at what the conductor calls Langster, on time. We have evidently arrived at a slow place. There is a station where you can buy porter, ale, sarsaparilla, pretzel, Baltimore oysters and other articles humorously called refreshments. In the night there is not the slightest sign of life about the place. There is a little old broken-down, on its last legs, tavern, opposite the station. Inwardly thinking of how we special correspondents bleed for the public good—how shamefully indifferent the public is to our sufferings, and how persons of a nautical turn of mind tell us to seek any port in the storm—we shoulder our shirt collar and break for the tavern, where, as Shenstone says, a man always finds his warmest welcome. The bed is a little lumpy, but it is clean, and what can you expect for two shillings. It is more than some of the patriots who nominated Mr. Buchanan, got in Cincinnati, for twenty. I would recommend this tavern to needy politicians who may have occasion to come here and ask Mr. Buchanan for office. It is not the establishment from which his letter is dated. We shall come to that anon.

A view of Lancaster by daylight does not make us fall in love with it. It is like Philadelphia, quiet, subdued, respectable, dull, sleepy. It has little red brick houses, with white shutters, like Philadelphia. It has a market place like Philadelphia, and its pet idiosyncrasy seems to be small taverns—the number of which is legion. The German type is predominant among the inhabitants—the number of small boys, dogs, loafers and pretty girls is about the same as in small towns generally. I said town—I beg pardon. Lancaster is a city; Lancaster has seventeen thousand inhabitants. Lancaster is the county seat of the richest county in Pennsylvania, except Philadelphia. Lancaster has a court house with a Corinthian facade. Lancaster has a great many lawyers, several newspapers, a large number of straight whigs, realized. Lancaster has a seminary for young ladies who are not allowed to accept invitations to ride, walk or visit or receive calls from suspicious cousins in slight moustaches, and patent leather boots. Finally, Lancaster is the home of James Buchanan, whom our southern brethren will insist upon calling Jeems Buck-anan. Can a Union with people who talk in that manner be lasting? James Buchanan the Democratic candidate for President of these United States. James Buchanan, Pennsylvania's favorite son, adored by the Keystone Club; James Buchanan, familiarly termed Old Buck, irreverently called "Ten Cent Jimmy," and profanely denominated in my hearing by a person in a red flannel shirt, "A d—— bloody old federalist," who could not, by no manner of means, have his—the gentleman in the red shirt—"wote."

Altogether, we may write down Lancaster, at this juncture, a very interesting place. The residence of a Presidential candidate, with plenty of patriotism, native whiskey, roses, small taverns, queer old streets, large Pennsylvania horses, stage coaches, strawberries, and pretty girls.

Now, if you please, we will "hire a hoss," and take a peep at Wheatland, Mr. Buchanan's residence. We have had various accounts as to its locality and distance from the city. Some say it's a mile and a half, or two miles, or three miles off. I think they are right. The "hoss" will cost us twelve shillings. We can keep him three hours. He is a slow, quiet, respectable Lancaster horse—walks up all the hills, and don't dare to trot down the other side. The wagon is like our rockaways.<sup>3</sup>

As has been indicated Buchanan came to Lancaster to study law, in 1809, and destiny was to will that his permanent residence for the rest of his long life was to be this ancient center of politics and prosperity. He early learned to appreciate his good Lancaster friends and when he made his adieu before his departure for Russia, in 1832, wrote:

Although my feelings are not very easily excited, yet my impressions on that day were solemn and sad. I was leaving a city where I had spent the best years of my life, where I had been uniformly the popular favorite, and above all, where I had many good and true friends who had never abandoned me under the most trying circumstances. Among these people I had acquired a competence for a man of moderate wishes and I think I may say without vanity my professional and personal character stood very high.<sup>4</sup>

Buchanan's letters show many evidences of the satisfaction and affection he felt for the town of his choice. He often expressed a desire to be at home when he was away in public service. His niece has recorded that he was ever ready to give careful attention to the discourse of the neighbors who were accustomed to call on him.

Even his political enemies were glad to testify to his good qualities as a citizen. In 1856, one said,

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<sup>3</sup> *New York Herald*, June 16, 1856.

<sup>4</sup> Klein, H. M. J., *Lancaster's Golden Century*, p. 77.

We knew Mr. Buchanan as one of our most respected fellow citizens—a gentleman of unblemished personal integrity, and unusually agreeable manners in his social intercourse with all classes. We knew him as a friend of the poor—as a perpetual benefactor of the poor widows of this city, who when the piercing blasts of each successive winter brought shrieks of cold, and hunger, and want, in the frail tenements of Poverty, could apply to the Buchanan Relief Donation for their annual Supply of wood, and sitting down with their orphaned children in the cheerful warmth of a blazing fire, lift their hearts in silent gratitude to God, and teach their little ones to bless the name of James Buchanan.<sup>5</sup>

The origin of the Widow's Fund alluded to is said to have been as follows. It is one of the best illustrations of his natural kindness of heart:

"On one occasion," a friend says, "When I was on a visit to Wheatland, I saw Mr. Buchanan go anxiously to the window and look out upon the night which was cold and stormy with sleet and snow, and I heard him say, 'God help the poor tonight.' The very next day he sent quite a large sum of money to the Mayor of Lancaster to buy fuel for the poor."

A letter of October 6, 1847, to Michael Carpenter,<sup>6</sup> shows that he had set apart an investment of \$4000, the interest of which was to be applied to the fund, and he obeyed the Scriptural injunction by asking that his name as donor be withheld from the public.

His will (sixth section) bequeathed to the City of Lancaster

the sum of \$2,000 in trust, to employ the annual interest of the same in purchasing fuel for the use of the poor and indigent females of the City of Lancaster during the winter season. This bequest is to be incorporated with the fund of \$4,000 provided by me some years ago for the same purpose, and is to be administered in the same manner by the city authorities.

Another community enterprise in which Buchanan took a prominent part was the transfer of Franklin

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in R. G. Horton's *Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, pp. 422, 423.

<sup>6</sup> Worner, William Frederick, "Unpublished Letters of James Buchanan, 15th President of the United States," in *Papers Read before the Lancaster County Historical Society*, XXXII. Nos. 5 and 6, p. 69.



College of Lancaster to Franklin and Marshall College. In fact he wrote the deed of transfer. Marshall College had come from Mercersburg—his own boyhood town where he had begun his schooling. He was President of the Board of Trustees of the new college for twelve years. His name was on the subscription list of Franklin College. As early as 1827, he had given \$300 to Marshall College before it was removed to Lancaster and at the joining of the institutions gave \$1,000. He helped direct the policies of the school and liked to attend its public exercises. Perhaps remembering his own activity at Dickinson, he encouraged the literary societies of the college. With others he had chosen the site for Franklin and Marshall College on what is now known as College Hill.

No account of Buchanan as a citizen of Lancaster would be complete without some account of his life-long friend, Hiram B. Swarr. Mr. Swarr, as Harris states in his *Biographical History of Lancaster County*, "enjoyed the life-long confidence of James Buchanan, and stood so high in his estimation as a legal practitioner as to be appointed by him one of his executors and also trustee for the execution of several important trusts created by the Will of the late ex-President." When Irelan wrote his volume on Buchanan in his sets of books, *The Republic*, he was unable to get material from Edward Y. Buchanan, Buchanan's brother, because he had given it to Curtis for the biography. Swarr, however gave some of the material he had collected to Irelan. He later describes Mr. Swarr in the same terms as Harris and adds that he was much like Buchanan in temperament and general appearance. Mr. Swarr was a prominent Democrat. In 1853, and for over ten years thereafter, he was chairman of the Democratic County Committee. From the fall of 1856, through Buchanan's term, he was Postmaster of Lancaster. He was at both the Cincin-

nati and Charleston Conventions as a delegate from Lancaster. In the language of those days he was indeed the "fides Achates" of Buchanan.

Another prominent friend of Buchanan was Doctor Henry Carpenter. Although an ardent Democrat, he was also the physician of Thaddeus Stevens. Doctor Carpenter had nearly arranged a meeting of the two political enemies but the death of Buchanan terminated the project before it was completed.<sup>7</sup>

During the campaign of 1856, his favorite inn became the rendezvous for the faithful Democrats who came from all parts of the Union to see him. A reporter of the time drew a pleasant picture of him which called for democracy as well as Democracy, and gives proof of Buchanan's skill at both.

Michael's Hotel is the St. Nicholas of Lancaster. It is Mr. Buchanan's town residence. He says you can get there the nicest dinner in the world. It is a good dinner, with nice young women to wait upon you; everything clean and substantial; no such aristocratic nonsense as soup or fish, or napkins or finger glasses. A good piece of roast beef, with fowl after that, and some currant pie for dessert. That's Michael's bill of fare. Mr. Buchanan sits at the end of the table, chatting with some ladies; opposite to him are Richardson, of Illinois; Manning, of South Carolina; Preston, of Kentucky; Brown, of Mississippi, and other pilgrims. The prophet eats heartily, smiles pleasantly, and apparently enjoys the glass of brandy and water brought by the landlord's own hands after all is over.

Mr. Buchanan dropped into the Grapes Hotel to-day, and held a familiar chat with an old friend or two in the little reading room back of the bar room, which opens into an arbor in the rear of the house. It is a dingy, old fashioned, but cozy room, and while the interview lasted, one of Mr. Buchanan's constituents was snoring on an old fashioned settee, and one or two others read the papers at a small centre table. He was told that his election is looked for as certain to be by his friends,

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<sup>7</sup> Among the other distinguished people who have lived in this County of Lancaster were Langdon Cheves, Governor Mifflin, Bishop Bowman, General Reynolds, slain at Gettysburg; David Ramsey, the historian; Robert Fulton, born here; Count Zinzendorf, patron of the American Moravians. The parents of John C. Calhoun lived for a time in Lancaster county, and moved thence to South Carolina.

and he seemed pleased by the information. In the course of the conversation, he gave it as his opinion that the election will be a struggle between sectionalists (in the opposition) and unionists (in the democracy), and, as a matter of principle, he would prefer to see the latter triumph. He is a taller and heavier man than I had expected to see him, moves about with alacrity, but yet looks fully sixty-five years old. He invariably walks to town from Wheatland, disdaining the assistance of horses, especially as walking reduces his chances for apoplexy. It was a picture not devoid of interest to see the courtly old gentleman who had commanded the respect of the aristocratic officials of England, sitting under mine host (Michael's) wine and fig tree, and conversing familiarly with people who call him "Jimmy." He is a well preserved specimen of humanity, and, so far as his physical powers are concerned, is capable of running a good heat in the Presidential race. Mr. Buchanan excused himself from his friends, by saying that he had an engagement to dine with an old German acquaintance in the city.

Not a solitary politician has arrived to-day, and the headquarters of distinguished strangers, Michael's Hotel, is left quite lonely. Several young men, most of them Lancasterian lawyers, reside at this house. Some of them were members of the "household delegation" which went from Lancaster county to the Cincinnati Convention, and co-operated with the Keystone Club, of Philadelphia, in getting up the outside pressure for "Old Buck." They look upon his election, and their own reward, as absolutely certain, and swear that the combined forces of "Fremont and Fillmore" cannot beat him.<sup>8</sup>

The following events marked Buchanan's departure for Washington in 1857:

On Monday the 2d, the new President was escorted from Wheatland by the people of Lancaster. The morning was bitter cold and considerable snow had fallen during the night, so that it was at first expected that the procession would be small. About six o'clock, the bells of all the churches, the court house, fire companies, etc., commenced ringing, and continued for almost half an hour, added to which, the cannon occasionally boomed from College Hill. The procession started about seven, with the Mayor of Lancaster at the head, and proceeded toward Wheatland. The wind was bitterly cold as to stop them at times. The musicians, who were seated in a large carriage drawn by ten white horses, provided for the purpose by Mr. Suter—after playing one or two tunes, were unable to perform any more, and some of them were compelled to get out of the conveyance and walk, to keep themselves warm.

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<sup>8</sup> *New York Herald*, June 16, 27, 1856.

At Wheatland, they were received by the President-elect with that blandness of manner that distinguishes him. He expressed regret that they should have put themselves to so much inconvenience and discomfort for his sake.

At Wheatland, the procession was compelled to wait for about a quarter of an hour, to enable Mr. Buchanan to arrange some private matters, at which he had been engaged previous to their arrival, and during this time the anxiety to see him was manifested by the eagerness with which the crowd gathered upon the porch and around the door, all struggling to the utmost to catch the first glimpse of the President. The private carriage which was to convey the President having been driven to the door, a rush was made for it, and the principal portion of the people were soon pressed so close to it as almost to prevent the necessary movements of the driver.

Presently, Mr. Buchanan was seen to issue from a door in one of the wings of the house, where he bade farewell to all the members of his household, and in company with his niece, Miss Lane, took his seat in the carriage. Quite a number here shook hands with him, and in response to the greetings of many he politely returned the compliment.

The procession then returned with the President to Lancaster.

Arrived opposite to College Hill, the cannon again pealed forth its thunders and shook the buildings with its report. A large number of citizens came out from the city some distance to meet the procession, and fell into line. As it proceeded along West King Street, the addition became very numerous, and the body was strung out to a great length, numbering over 2,000 persons.

All along the line of this street vast crowds of people were stretched, all desirous of showing their approbation of the man who was so soon to be elevated to the highest post in the nation, while the ladies in great numbers crowded the windows and balconies of the houses, waving their handkerchiefs.

As Mr. Buchanan changed from the carriage to the cars, the pressure to get a sight of him was even greater than before, and many rushed up to bid him adieu. He seemed to be greatly affected, and answered all their congratulations with an earnestness and sincerity that showed he felt what he said. After he had been seated at the window of the car, he again shook hands with numbers who pressed up to do so. As the train moved off, he politely returned the demonstrations of respect in return to which the crowd sent up cheer after cheer, that plainly showed there was nothing but the heartfelt outpourings of its sentiments at work.

At every station the President-elect was welcomed with enthusiasm, and his cortège swelled by citizens and military companies. On his arrival at Washington he entered a barouche and

was driven to the National Hotel where he declined to receive visitors. He reserved the whole day of Tuesday to himself likewise.

His immediate escort to Washington consisted of the local military company, the Fencibles, committees of councils, representative of Franklin and Marshall College, and of the Board of Trustees of that institution, together with a number of personal friends and loyal citizens of Lancaster.”<sup>9</sup>

During his Presidency, Buchanan looked forward to his return to Lancaster and Wheatland. The ceremonies upon his home coming<sup>10</sup> were fitting, and showed the esteem in which he was held by his friends and fellow townsmen. He was said to have been visibly affected by the tribute addressed to him on that occasion.

Mr. Buchanan suffered some embarrassments from his political foes when he was living in retirement. All the serious trouble, however, seems to have come or to have been threatened by strangers staying in or near Lancaster, and not from the people themselves.

An article, in 1868, summarized his qualities as a citizen. Probably the sketch is inclined to scant praise rather than over praise.

He was a good citizen; orthodox and conservative in all obediences to law and morality. He was close, but not mean; he assisted his relatives, contributed to local benevolences, went to church regularly, was fond of the society of the young, and of young ladies particularly, and not a breath of suspicion exists in the whole country that he ever made a dishonest penny in public life, or permitted any public corruption he could control.

Between himself and the Lancaster people were many friendly associations. His large, double-horse carriage used to halt at many a door, and he never departed but his gracious deportment was praised before the sound of the wheels died away. There is a sturdy town pride about Lancaster, which, while it was not overfond of Mr. Buchanan, would have died in the streets before he should have been insulted. He had been so many years away from home on public duties, and had so outgrown his generation,

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<sup>9</sup> *American Phrenological Journal*, New York, 1856, xxv. 87.

<sup>10</sup> Curtis, George Ticknor, *Life of James Buchanan*. II. 509, 510.

that few were acquainted with him far back enough to venture on familiarity.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time the correspondent of the *New York World* who probably was better acquainted with Buchanan, wrote:

Those who were admitted to the hospitalities of his home know how genial he was, what a store of stories he had for every listener, how women and little children loved him and how he had their confidence. It was not because he had held high public trusts, but because he was a good citizen, a good neighbor, and a good man, that James Buchanan's memory was honored today by a funeral the like of which Lancaster has never seen before.<sup>12</sup>

The concluding part, entitled *The Squire at Home*, will appear in the next issue.

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<sup>11</sup> *Cincinnati Commercial*, clipping in Buchanan Scrap Book in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>12</sup> *New York World*, June 4, 1868. Perhaps written by Buchanan's friend, William B. Reed.