BACHELOR FATHER — JAMES BUCHANAN
AS A FAMILY MAN

PHILIP SHRIVER KLEIN

Most people have a very limited acquaintance with the career of President James Buchanan, but everybody seems to know one fact about him. He was the only bachelor to be President of the United States. The Republicans introduced this fact into campaign propaganda in 1856 as evidence that Buchanan’s character was defective and his life dissolute. James Gordon Bennett of the New York Herald wrote that Buchanan’s unmarried state “plainly implies a lack of some essential quality,” or “that there was not in Pennsylvania or in Washington a lady fit to be his bride.” “No man,” he continued, “who has not been married can thoroughly understand human nature... Mr. Buchanan, if he is elected, will be the first President who shall carry into the White House the crude and possibly the gross tastes of a bachelor.” ¹ Political cartoons took the same tack. One, entitled “The Reverie of a Bachelor,” pictured Buchanan sitting in a garret, his tattered coat across his knee, sewing on patches labelled with campaign pledges, and saying: “If I am elected — let me see — $25,000 a year — no rent to pay and no women and babies about — I guess I can afford a new outfit.” ²

One of the doggerel songs put out by the Republican campaign managers, entitled “The Bachelor Candidate,” ran this way:

It’s time to be doing, the play has begun,
There’s mischief a brewing as sure as a gun.
The Buck and Breck noodles are stupidly bent
On choosing a Bach for our next President.

A bachelor who, like his species, you know,
Is afraid of the girls, and to union a foe.
Then up and be doing, for danger is rife,
A man is but moonshine who hasn’t a wife.

¹ An address delivered before the Society on March 29, 1967, by Dr. Klein, Professor of History at the Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Klein is author of several books as well as the definitive biography entitled President James Buchanan.—Editor

² Buchanan Foundation, Wheatland, has copies, filed with the Lancaster County Historical Society.
For a fusty old codger, who ne'er, as tis said
Had children to speak of, and never was wed,
To be our chief ruler, it must be confessed,
Is doing up matters in mighty bad taste.

Imagine him in the White House, if you can
With all things arranged on the bachelor plan:
Not a petticoat in it to lend it a charm,
Nor a bright smile of woman to keep the place warm.

In festoons the cobwebs are clustering round,
All things in confusion, from attic to ground,
Chairs, sofas, and tables with dust covered o'er
While quids and cigar stumps embellish the floor.

Just think what queer things his receptions would be,
Uncouth gander parties, as all must agree;
For a house with no mistress a place is, I ween,
Where no well-bred lady would wish to be seen. 3

These three samples of Presidential campaign propaganda in 1856 paint a picture of Buchanan's personal and social habits which is as distorted as the portrayal of his political attributes concocted by his political enemies. Strangely, both of these contrived stereotypes, invented for partisan purposes, have become fixed in the public mind, and still pass for truth even in some academically respectable circles. I have exploded some of the most inane myths about Buchanan and the Civil War in my biography of him — such as the assertion that he wanted to send cannon from Pittsburgh to the South, whereas in fact he took summary action to stop this shipment and received congratulations from the city council for his swift and decisive intervention in this affair. Tonight I propose to deal with a less portentous subject than the Civil War, and to expose some details of Buchanan's social life, an inquiry that will reveal Buchanan's character but through subject matter that is full of fun and human interest — that is, girls.

To keep track of the ladies who figure in this story, I should tell you at the outset how I propose to handle them. First, I must refresh you briefly about The One — the tragic episode of Buchanan's engagement to Ann Caroline Coleman. After that, we will look at The Others — those whom Buck came close to marrying; and finally we will explore his responsibilities to his own family, showing how he centered his paternal love on his many orphaned nephews and nieces.

From 1809 to 1819, Jimmy Buchanan, then in his twenties, played the role of the debonair young man about town in Lancaster where he practiced law. A handsome, blonde six-footer, he led a gregarious and high-spirited life, frequenting the taverns and occasionally, after imbibing too much, dancing on the table tops. At the same time, he

3 New York Herald, July 14, 1856.
worked hard, served two terms in the State Assembly, and twice successfully defended Lancaster’s president judge from impeachment before the bar of the State Senate. His personal and professional qualities gained him a welcome among the socially prominent families of the little community. Buchanan soon became one of the most promising and eligible young bachelors in the town, and happily shared his evenings with one after another of the town’s young ladies. At length in 1819, he became smitten with Ann Caroline Coleman, daughter of ironmaster Robert Coleman, reputed to be the richest man in Pennsylvania. Ann’s parents strongly disapproved the match, for as people newly rich, they hoped to marry their daughter into the wealthy Philadelphia aristocracy. Mrs. Coleman, particularly, sowed doubts, implanting the idea that Buchanan was merely a fortune hunter. This suspicion took shape in Ann’s mind when Buchanan, during a fortnight stay in Philadelphia on legal business, did not write to her. It seems now that the mother intercepted the letters he had sent. The girl was further plied with rumors that James had been philandering while in the big city. On his return to Lancaster, he stopped first to report to his client, William Jenkins, president of the Farmers Bank, whose continuing solvency in this panic time of 1819 depended upon the success of Buchanan’s legal mission. It happened that at this moment, Mrs. Jenkins’ two nieces, the Hubley sisters, were visiting. Buchanan had taken them to parties before and the town knew that he and Grace Hubley had liked each other. Mrs. Jenkins and the girls insisted he stay to tea, and he did so, intending to go on to the Coleman’s who lived just a few doors away. But Grace quickly sent her servant with a note to Ann Coleman, unknown to Buchanan, saying that Buck had stopped to see her first. When Buchanan arrived at the Coleman house, a servant there curtly informed him that Ann would not see him. She wrote an agitated letter terminating the engagement, and the next day set out for Philadelphia to visit her married sister. She apparently caught cold on the way, was nervously distraught, and became hysterical at the Hemphill home in Philadelphia. The Hemphills thought she had recovered and went to the theater, but in their absence Ann became wild again, sent a maid to the apothecary’s for laudanum, and took such a dose that she died that night, despite the best efforts of local doctors to save her.4

The Coleman's, in Lancaster, refused to receive Buchanan, returned unopened his deeply moving letter of condolence, and did

nothing to abate the rumor which now began to circulate. The whole town talked of nothing but this tragic affair, and one lady phrased the gist of it in one sentence: "I believe that her friends now look upon him as her murderer." The horror of the tragedy to Buchanan lay in the awful fact that no one actually knew what had happened. Did she commit suicide or make a mistake? Was Ann's death purposeful or accidental? The question remains unanswered to this day, and Buchanan spent the rest of his life haunted by hideous uncertainty. This affair marked the major turning point in Buchanan's life, and possibly a major one in the history of the United States. Except for it, he would probably have settled down to domestic life in Lancaster and continued to practice law there. But to get him out of town, his friends nominated him to Congress, and in 1821 he began a political career that would keep him in Washington almost continuously for the next forty years and terminate in the Presidency.

Washington, in 1821, held few attractions to the women who accompanied their husbands there. It had not yet recovered from the disaster of 1814 when the British burned it; except for the Capitol and the White House, a few embassies and a few fine private homes, the city offered only a morass of mudholes and a scattering of disreputable looking rooming houses, where most of the government officials lived. Buchanan moved into Mrs. Peyton's rooming and boarding house with half a dozen Congressmen and their families, and the George Blakes of Boston. Blake assisted Daniel Webster in legal work, and Mrs. Blake took it upon herself to help her handsome table companion, Jimmy Buchanan, to forget his recent grief. Knowledge of the Ann Coleman affair in Washington gave Buchanan a sort of romantic appeal and the women, having little to do, made a determined effort to comfort him. Buchanan became so constant an escort of Mrs. Blake to social functions that newcomers mistook them for man and wife. But Mrs. Blake stated her objective frankly: she told Buchanan she believed his assertion that because of Ann Coleman, he would never marry; but that would leave out of the picture the influence of designing females who generally arranged such things, and she proposed to be such a one. Washington was full of lovely maids and matrons, but eligible young bachelors were few, and Mrs. Blake conducted a campaign to make them fewer.  

6 George Blake to Buchanan, March 30, 1823, Buchanan MSS, Hist. Soc. of Penna.
Buchanan had an active and exciting social life as a Congressman during the 1820's. He accepted an invitation from the Blakes to come to Boston in the summer of 1823 to follow up his acquaintance with someone designated only as "the Lady" whom Mrs. Blake had been promoting in Washington; but he never made the trip. He saw a good deal of the Van Ness girls, one of whom became the wife of Judge James Roosevelt; Cora Livingston and Catherine Van Rensselaer of New York; the Misses Crowninshield of Vermont; Priscilla Cooper who later married President Tyler's son, Robert; the Caton sisters of Baltimore, one of whom later became the Duchess of Somerset, and many others including a sprightly Julia and a giddy Matilda about whom he wrote glowing descriptions. By the late 1820's Buchanan had again entered the Lancaster social circle. The death of Sarah Coleman under circumstances remarkably similar to those of her older sister Ann — parental disapproval of her proposed marriage and probable suicide — changed the town's condemnation of Buchanan to sympathy for him and the young ladies.

Buchanan did not permit any letters of romantic interest to remain in his files; almost no letters from the ladies to him seem extant, but many letters of Buchanan's friends comment upon his social interests. In 1826 these inquire about his progress with a Mrs. Blodget of Philadelphia, in 1827 they warn against letting the "Dandies or Southrons steal your fair constituent" 7; in 1828 William Jenkins congratulates him on his plans to marry "a black-eyed northern belle"; and in 1829 he is seeing a good deal of Laura and Clementina Pleasan- ton, daughters of Stephen Pleasanton, the man who saved the original copies of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and other state papers just before the British burned Washington in 1814.

Buchanan's life took an abrupt turn when he became the American Minister to Russia from 1831 to 1833. By the time he returned to enter the United States Senate many changes had occurred. Death had taken his mother and half a dozen of his close friends, a number of his former girl friends had married, and new political responsibilities sat heavily on him. At this time he became involved in the affair that came closer to marriage than any other would ever bring him, his engagement to Mary Kittera Snyder.

This young lady was the second daughter of John Snyder. Her mother, Mary Kittera of Lancaster before her marriage, died in 1820 shortly after the birth of the child, Mary, in whom we are interested.

7 Samuel Parke to Buchanan, Feb. 17, 1827, Buchanan MSS, Hist. Soc. of Penna.
The maternal grandmother, Mary Wilkes Kittera, feared to leave the two infants with their father and took them to the Kitteras' Philadelphia home, 518 Walnut Street. There they lived under close supervision, for their grandmother suspected that the father, who had never accepted the arrangement, might try to kidnap them. John Snyder's proclivity to high-jinks and unexpected action made Mrs. Kittera's precautions appear quite natural.

Handsome John Snyder, as he was known around his Selinsgrove home, was the son of Pennsylvania's Governor Simon Snyder. He had the reputation of an eccentric, wearing a straw hat in winter, and engaging in such pranks as driving to church in an ox cart, riding his conveyance up the front stairs, and wedging it in the sanctuary doorway. Some years after the death of his wife, he stood as best man for one of his friends, and after the ceremony inveigled the bride to run off with him. The unwed couple set out for New York State, and in due course produced a child whom they named Utica, in honor of the horse races they had attended at that town during their elopement. In later life Handsome John left instructions that he wished no ceremony after he died, but that a stone should be cut bearing this inscription: "John Snyder . . . Always ready for further orders." 8

How did Buchanan become involved with the Kitteras? He knew them initially when the family had lived in Lancaster, and had kept in touch with male members of it through law and politics. He often visited his intimate friend, Judge Thomas Kittera of Philadelphia, Mary Kittera Snyder's uncle. Buchanan thus knew Mary Snyder from infancy. In 1825, Buchanan's sister Sarah died, leaving a five-year-old child, Elizabeth Huston. The father, already ill, could not care for the child. When the Kitteras offered to take Elizabeth as a playmate for Mary Snyder, Buchanan arranged to pay for her support and to have her raised in the Kittera family. Thus it was that James Buchanan continued to visit the Kitteras regularly and to become a kind of foster father to both his niece, Elizabeth Huston, and to her playmate, Mary Snyder.

When Buchanan became a Senator in 1834 after his return from the Russian mission, he purchased Robert Coleman's town house in Lancaster where he had once courted Ann Coleman, and hired Miss Hetty Parker as cook and housekeeper. With an establishment set up and furnished, he reclaimed Elizabeth Huston, now fourteen, from the Kitteras and sent her to boarding school in New Jersey, with her

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home in the Lancaster house where Miss Hetty took care of her.

Mary Snyder also was growing up, and while Buchanan had playfully talked of her as "his intended" when she was fourteen, he apparently had become much more serious by the time she reached seventeen. In this instance, as in all Buchanan's affairs of the heart, he covered his tracks so well that the historian must piece together what he can from scattered bits and pieces. Some say that his interests lay not in Mary Snyder, but in her maiden aunt, Ann Kittera; but I think that his letters to the family speaking of "that portion in which I feel a peculiar interest," refer to Mary Snyder. In June 1837, he wrote to Mrs. Francis P. Blair, declining an invitation to visit Andrew Jackson at the Hermitage in 1838, with the statement that "long 'ere that time I expect to be married and have the cares of a family resting upon my shoulders."

Even on such slim evidence we can read the absence of the divine passion and the probability of a marriage of convenience. Of Mary's lifelong devotion to Buchanan we have ample proof, and in Buchanan's decision to offer security and position to a young girl who wished to give him love, admiration and companionship, I find nothing incongruous or out of character for either. That he was old enough to be her father was not as much a barrier to the match then as it might seem now. Old Baron Bodisco in 1838 married a teen-aged girl whom he covered with diamonds. Buchanan attended the high society wedding in Washington as escort to fourteen-year-old Jessie Benton. Jessie, against firm orders of her father, eloped at the age of seventeen with Colonel John C. Fremont. Scarcely two years later, widower President John Tyler married a girl thirty years younger than he.

Social propriety did not discourage the match, but Buchanan's family did. He still had four sisters and a brother living, all of whom viewed the impending marriage with alarm. All were poor, and two of the sisters were in the advanced stage of tuberculosis. They leaned on brother James as the one to care for their young children; Buchanan's brother, Edward, an impoverished Episcopal prelate, eagerly hoped to share largely in his rich brother's estate, but a marriage would cut him off.

Between 1837 and 1841 death struck these families swiftly. Buchanan's sister Harriet lost her husband in 1837 and died herself

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9 Buchanan to Thomas Kittera, Oct. 9, 1834, Schock MSS, Buchanan Foundation.
10 Buchanan to Thomas Kittera, Sept. 25, 1837, Schock MSS, Buchanan Foundation.
11 June 3, 1837, Buchanan MSS, Hist. Soc. of Penna.
in 1840, leaving their seven-year-old son, James Buchanan Henry, under the guardianship of Uncle James. His sister, Jane Lane, died in 1839, followed by her husband, leaving four orphans, three of them minors. Buchanan legally adopted nine-year-old Harriet Lane, and took financial responsibility for thirteen-year-old Mary Lane and sixteen-year-old Elliott Eskridge Lane. Family problems increased to the point that the impending marriage never took place. Mary Snyder may have felt the coolness of other members of the Buchanan clan and reconsidered; or Buchanan may have questioned the wisdom of saddling a young bride with foster children. Whatever the reasons, Buchanan's announcement to Mrs. Blair that he planned to be married before the summer of 1838 proved wrong.

Politics more seriously absorbed him in the 1840's when he made serious efforts to capture the Democratic Presidential nomination, and as his political prospects expanded he became ever more a challenge to the ingenuity of Washington's matchmakers. For a time he saw much of Annie Payne, Dolly Madison's niece, who was seventeen in 1840. She, with her two cousins, Adele Cutts, who married Stephen A. Douglas, and Rose O'Neal, who married Dr. Greenhow, occupied the center of attention in Washington social life of the era. Buchanan had become a warm friend of the aged Dolly Madison, had persuaded the Senate to publish her deceased husband's Notes on the Federal Convention, and made her his hostess at large parties he gave as Secretary of State. Annie Payne lived with Dolly at the old gray house on Lafayette Square. Buchanan's state of mind about Annie is exposed clearly in a poem he sent to her in 1842 — the only piece of verse I have ever encountered from his hand:

In thee my chilled and blighted heart has found
A green spot in the dreary waste around.
Oh, that my fate in youthful days had been
To have lived with such an one, unknown, unseen,
Loving and lov'd, t' have passed our days
Sequestered from the world's malignant gaze!

A match of age with youth can only bring
The farce of winter dancing with the spring.
Blooming nineteen can never well agree
With the dull age of half a century.
Thus reason speaks what rebel passion hates.
Passion — which controls the very fates.
May Heaven's rich blessings crown your future life
And may you be a happy, loving wife.12

12 March 18, 1842, addressed to "The Maid from Tennessee." Buchanan MSS, Hist. Soc. of Penna.
While Secretary of State in the Polk Administration, Buchanan played the field. He often took the heiress, Elizabeth Simpson, to parties, but in 1848 she married Richard Rush's son, Benjamin. He could be found regularly at the soirées of Mrs. Justice Catron and Rose Greenhow, and developed considerable intimacy with both — so much so with Mrs. Catron that her husband became somewhat restive. But the main attraction in the Catron household was Mrs. Benson, pretty young widowed niece of Mrs. Catron. Buck's close friends reported him in love with her, and he was still contemplating marrying Mrs. Benson as late as 1850, for when his housekeeper at Wheatland, Hetty Parker, spoke of leaving her position to marry, Buchanan wrote: "Should Miss Hetty marry Mr. Evans, . . . I shall then want a housekeeper . . . and whose society would be so charming as that of—" He left the name blank, as always, but all the context points to Mrs. Benson.

During the decade before he became President, Buchanan's name was linked with many others. For a time it was a Miss Whitney from Connecticut, then Ann Eliza Watterson, then Laura and Clementina Pleasanton, daughters of his old friend Stephen Pleasanton, and finally with Sarah Childress Polk, widow of President Polk who died shortly after Taylor's inauguration. The latter would have probably made a sane match, for the two had much in common, both in temperament and interests. One of Buchanan's friends wrote facetiously, upon reading an 1855 newspaper story that he planned to marry Sarah Polk, that "it would be an agreeable way of Polking your way into the Presidency." During his ministry to Great Britain, 1853-1856, Buchanan chose a visiting American girl, Miss Willcox, as his favorite, and on trips to Paris had a gay time with the vivacious Ellen Ward.

Buchanan assumed the Presidency at the age of sixty-five, but neither his age nor his position removed him from the field of eligible bachelors. Buchanan's close friend and Secretary of the Treasury, Howell Cobb of Athens, Georgia, introduced him to Elizabeth C. Craig. Mrs. Craig, a grass widow from Athens, had already created a furore in the little Georgia town by detonating what local history calls the "Beauty War," or the Second War of Roses. Some years earlier a minor controversy arose in Athens over whether Mrs. Craig, or Mrs. John LeConte, wife of the president of the University, was the

13 George Plitt to Buchanan, Jan. 10, 1847, Buchanan MSS, Hist. Soc. of Penna.
14 Buchanan to Miss Lane, Aug. 4, 1850, Buchanan MSS, Hist. Soc. of Penna.
15 Sophie Plitt to Buchanan, Sept. 17, 1855, Buchanan MSS, Box III, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.
more beautiful. Before long the whole town took sides, and the episode split both town and gown; but in the end Mrs. Craig walked off with the honors. One person described Elizabeth Craig as having "the faculty of bringing to light all the old bachelors in the land, from Maine to California." Mrs. Craig, flushed with victory in the Beauty War, wrote to the Cobbs that she now proposed to come to Washington to snare no less a personage than the President of the United States in matrimony. The Cobbs cooperated and sat back in huge amusement as the campaign progressed. Buchanan undoubtedly was smitten, for the lady was not only beautiful, but witty, lively and apparently had some of the qualities of the present day Zsa Zsa Gabor. Staid Washingtonians said she was too demonstrative for Washington society, but many matrons envied the way she could make her numerous admirers dance the Highland Fling.

Word of the campaign quickly spread around Washington and the sporting fraternity established betting odds on when or whether Lizzie Craig would become Mrs. Buchanan. When the President invited her to move into the White House for six weeks as his guest, odds in her favor rose sharply. Even anecdotes played their part. Howell Cobb told, with uproarious laughter, how Buchanan had confided to him at lunch that he was tired because he had spent a restless night dreaming of Mrs. Craig. Within hours, the odds moved. But when eager politicians began to use Lizzie as a private line to the President’s ear to gain favors, and he failed to respond, the relationship cooled. Mrs. Craig, after about a year, gave up old Buck as a hopelessly hardened bachelor, and began to refer to him as “The Grand Turk.” I suspect that if she had let politics alone she might have carried the game farther. Because he always gave courteous and amiable attention to women, they often were used to plant ideas or to sound him out on touchy political subjects; but Buchanan was no neophyte and could not be managed by this obvious device. Mrs. Craig ultimately married a Chicago merchant and spent the years of the Civil War most unhappily in Lincoln country where she had to endure social ostracism as a Confederate sympathizer.

By 1859 the Craig affair had passed into history, and Buchanan next became attentive to a Virginia widow with three small children, Mrs. Bass. She was one of the few women who strongly advised him

not to marry. This apparently took him so aback that he grew interested. One summer afternoon in 1859, when Buchanan was entertaining a group of friends on the front porch at Soldiers' Home, then the summer White House, Mrs. Bass drove up to the gate. As soon as she came in sight, according to a letter from one of the group, "the President immediately left — in a few moments after we had said howdy and got seated the old Chief came tripping and smiling out, dressed in an inch of his life — and Mrs. Gwin declares he changed his coat, pants, and shoes in that short time — to see the widow. Now, did you think any woman could make him do that? I never could have believed it if the proof was not so plain." 

Mrs. Kate Thompson, wife of Buchanan's Secretary of the Interior, whom the President liked very much and visited too often when her husband was out of town, was "very anxious to make a match" between the Chief and Mrs. Bass. She went as the President's guest to the Bedford Springs Hotel in 1859, but the anticipated happy vacation was marred by several awkward events. Buchanan drew quarters next to his most bitter political enemy, Simon Cameron. While the President and Mrs. Bass were dancing at the Saturday night ball, the abolitionists ran off with Mrs. Bass' Negro servant. The maid took only her own clothes, though there were money and jewelry in the room. Mrs. Bass showed no special annoyance. When Mrs. Kate Thompson sympathized, saying she supposed Mrs. Bass had forty more, she did not reveal that she had 325 more on her Virginia plantation. But Buchanan was annoyed, for he and most of the guests there believed that Simon Cameron had engineered the whole affair to spite the President. Buchanan came no closer to matrimony with Mrs. Bass than with any of the others, but he did remain in touch with her during the Civil War. She was a strong Union sympathizer, freed all her slaves, incurred the wrath of her neighbors, and at length had her plantation wrecked by the Union forces. She became ill and after a great deal of difficulty was able to gain a pass through the lines to come to New York where she remained through the War.

This brief chronicle of Buchanan's more conspicuous relation-

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18 Clementina Pleasanton to Buchanan, July 19, 1859, Buchanan MSS, Hist. Soc. of Penna.
19 Kate Thompson to Mrs. Howell Cobb, July 10, 1859, Cobb MSS, University of Georgia Library.
20 Clementina Pleasanton to Buchanan, July 19, 1859, op. cit.
21 Leonora Clayton to Mrs. Cobb, and Philip Clayton to Howell Cobb, Aug. 4, 1858, Cobb MSS, University of Georgia Library.
ships with some of the many ladies of his life calls for a little interpretation. It seems clear that his desire to marry for love ended with the death of Ann Coleman, for all his later ventures to the rim of matrimony seem to have been based on mutual accommodation rather than any surge of emotion. It seems quite consistent with Buchanan's character that he should continue throughout life to feel a gnawing sense of guilt about Ann, and to remain true to his vow at the time of her death — that his heart lay in the grave with her.

But he was also a practical man. Buchanan had read most of Sir Walter Scott and was well acquainted with Chesterfield's letters. He worked seriously at being chivalrous, and approached nearly the ideal of the Victorian gentleman. He consciously acted the part of the knight-errant toward ladies when there appeared to be little chance of his being taken seriously as a lover. His dalliances seemed absorbing and stimulating to him in exact proportion as their object was out of the range of matrimony. Hence his constant attendance upon married ladies, while remaining cold to equally attractive eligibles.

His place within the Buchanan family also influenced his view of marriage. He respected and sometimes feared his father, but deeply loved his mother. He remained the only boy among four sisters for the first fifteen years of his life. Boys often form a closer attachment to their mothers than to their fathers; Buchanan certainly did. After the death of his father, James' mother strongly instilled in him his responsibility to take care of the womenfolk of the family. After his mother's death in 1834, he seems to have been looking, in his marriage plans, not so much for a wife as for a mother. He phrased this quite clearly in a letter to Mrs. James Roosevelt, writing: "I feel it is not good for a man to be alone, and should not be astonished to find myself married to some old maid who can nurse me when I am sick, provide good dinners for me when I am well, and not expect from me any very ardent or romantic affection." 22 In every episode which looked as if it might lead to marriage, Buchanan's sisters and his brother Edward maintained a steady opposition which in the end proved decisive.

This brings me to the final aspect of my topic — the family, in which Buchanan for forty years played the role of the bachelor father. Of the original six girls and five boys, four of Buchanan's sisters lived to maturity — Jane, Maria, Sarah and Harriet. By 1850 all of these had married, had children and died, leaving Buchanan with

twenty-two nieces and nephews and fifteen grandnephews and -nieces. Since 1825, Buchanan, as the rich uncle, had become formal guardian for three orphaned minors who lived mostly with him, and took the major responsibility for six others who had reached the middle teens when the parents died. His youngest brother, the Reverend Edward Y. Buchanan, married Eliza Foster, sister of Stephen Collins Foster, and had numerous children. Edward was the only one of the eleven Buchanans of the President's generation to outlive him.

I have already mentioned Sarah Buchanan Huston who died leaving five-year-old Elizabeth Huston in the care of her uncle James. When Mr. Huston died a few years later, Elizabeth became her uncle's sole responsibility. After placing her with the Kitteras for nine years, he provided for her schooling and took care of her in his Lancaster home until her marriage.

Sister Harriet lost her husband, the Reverend Robert Henry of Greensburg, in 1837. Left with an infant son and no money, Harriet received funds from James until her death in 1840, when he became the guardian for James Buchanan Henry, now seven. He stayed in the King Street house in Lancaster under Miss Hetty's care while Buchanan was in Washington at Senate sessions. Between sessions he worked actively as foster father. The boy had a wild streak and a stubborn temperament. He refused to eat vegetables, and his Senator uncle tried all kinds of devices to break the habit. In the summer of 1843 he offered a magic lantern for Christmas, and as the season approached received a letter in childish scrawl from little Buck referring to the lantern and stating, "I am trying hard for it and think it will please you when you hear that I eat vegetables." But the flesh proved weak; and three years later Uncle James, now Secretary of State, abandoned diplomacy for force. He wrote from Washington: "James Henry is here. I intend to commence with him tomorrow & make him eat vegetables or he shall have no meat." He later sent Buck Henry to Princeton, and employed him as private secretary during part of his British ministry and during his years as President.

Buchanan's sister Maria lost two husbands before she married the third, Dr. Charles M. Yates of Meadville. She had a daughter, Jessie Magaw, by her first husband, and four children by her third. Maria, like all the others, had continual financial trouble. Dr. Yates had little money and difficulty in holding on to what he had. He was

23 James B. Henry to Buchanan, Nov. 6, 1843, Buchanan MSS, Box I, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.
24 Buchanan to Harriet Lane, July 3, 1846, Buchanan MSS, Hist. Soc. of Penna.
hot on politics, went to meetings when he was needed in the office and antagonized a good many of his patients by making election wagers with them until he learned that whether he won or lost the bets, he always lost the patients who were angry if he won and feared his treatment if they won.  

Jessie proved a delicate problem after the birth of the Yates children, and Uncle James undertook her care. He was extremely fond of her, partly because her father had been his old schoolteacher at Mercersburg. Jessie had poor health and as Maria's family increased, Jessie's position as stepchild became more difficult. Buchanan ultimately sent her to school in Mercersburg and saw her happily married. Of her he wrote: "If she lives . . . she will make a fine woman. She is industrious. If not very smart, she is very good, and that is better." 

Buchanan financed the Meadville home and medical office for Dr. Yates and Maria, and collected $150 a month on the mortgage. Periodically he asked the doctor to send him only $100 and to give the other fifty to Maria, but he never entered the item in his ledger until he had a letter from Maria telling him that she had actually gotten her fifty. Buchanan's oldest sister, Jane Buchanan Lane, died in 1839 and her husband two years later. They left four children, James B. Lane, Elliott Eskridge Lane, Mary Elizabeth Lane and Harriet Lane. James Lane came to Lancaster where he entered business; Eskridge and Mary went to live with their father's people in Charlestown, Virginia, and nine-year-old Harriet, at her own insistent request, became the ward of Uncle James. She moved into the King Street house in Lancaster just a year after Buck Henry arrived, so that the cousins grew up together. Of all the family, Harriet soon became the center of Buchanan's personal life.

A few of the bills for Harriet's care during her first year with him showed Buchanan that to raise a young girl brought special problems. For example, we have, dated July 3, 1841, a bill from Ellen Hanlin for "Applying 24 dozen leeches with cups, $45.00," and a month later a bill from Dr. A. M. Cassidy reading thus: "April 28, 1841: to 193 visits, cupping, medicines, ointments, etc. at .50 per visit; $96.50. July 10, 17, 26, Aug. 3, 10, 1 Bottle of Senayrus Panacea at $2.00 per bottle. Total $106.50." 

25 Philip S. Klein, President James Buchanan, a Biography (University Park, Pa., 1962), 127.  
26 Buchanan to Maria Yates, April 1, 1839, Yates Collection. Photostats in possession of Dr. Roy F. Nichols.  
27 Elliott Eskridge Lane MSS, Buchanan Foundation.
bright, mischievous, difficult to bridle, quick in temper but affectionate and full of good spirits.

Buchanan sent her to school first in Lancaster, then in Charlestown, Virginia, with her sister Mary, and finally to the Convent School in Georgetown when he was Secretary of State. "Your religious principles are doubtless so well settled," he wrote her, "that you will not become a nun." The sentence contained a barb, for she had just recently been under discipline at the school in Charlestown for corresponding with a boy she had met at Bedford Springs against the strict orders of the headmistress. Uncle James trained Harriet with all the love and care of a doting father. He bought the Wheatland estate in part to provide her with a residence of which she could be proud, and where she could entertain in style. She joined him in London during his service as Minister to the Court of St. James, and there she so impressed Queen Victoria that the monarch assigned her the rank of ministerial consort, a conspicuous mark of royal favor that opened all doors. She had a host of suitors, from Sir Fitz Roy Kelly, a former cabinet minister and one of the richest men in the kingdom, to a young man from Philadelphia who sailed to London in the expectation of winning a favorable answer to his suit. In the end, she told them all, "No," explaining, "Beaux are pleasant but dreadfully troublesome." Harriet was frequently entertained by the royal family, dined with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and met the Emperor Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie of France. At Oxford University, when Buchanan and Alfred Lord Tennyson received honorary degrees, the students nearly broke up the proceedings by cheering and whistling when she appeared.

Buchanan's pride in Harriet strongly influenced his decision to accept the Presidential nomination in 1856 at a time when his political sense told him he would be well out of it. But he could not cast away the opportunity to have his striking and talented niece as mistress of the White House. Indeed, no previous hostess there had received better training for this demanding task than Harriet Lane. Fresh from her successes at the British Court, she brought to her new station not only a knowledge of protocol and of high society etiquette, but also the eager enthusiasm of a girl in her twenties.

As First Lady she directed her efforts along three lines: she expanded the social role of the White House with receptions, teas, dinners and musicales which set national patterns of conduct and dress;

28 July 3, 1846, Buchanan MSS, Hist. Soc. of Penna.
she gave the prestige of her position to philanthropic enterprises such as hospitals, prison reform, aid to the blind, educational experiments and redress of grievances of the American Indians; and finally, she strongly encouraged patronage of the arts by inviting internationally famous musicians and other artists to the White House, making it for the first time a recognized focal point of interest in the arts. She was, indeed, one of the centers of gayety and good spirits in a politically sombre Administration.

This brief view of some of the personal relationships of James Buchanan does not bring any world-shaking conclusions, but it does illustrate how far the picture of the fifteenth President with which I started this paper strays from the truth. It shows that we are dealing not with a lonely, cold and self-centered person, devoid of concern for others and shunned by women, but rather a devoted family man, constantly seeking out the companionship of the ladies and as constantly being sought by them, generous but not foolish with his money, and deeply concerned with the problems of others. In short, his true stereotype is not the “fusty old codger,” but rather the “bachelor father.”