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The Girl He Left Behind: The Letters of Harriet Hutchinson Salisbury

By ALLEN F. DAVIS

A GREAT many young men left Vermont to go West in the nineteenth century. Some of them took their wives with them, but others left their girls behind. The girls watched and waited. A few of the men came back; many forgot their promises. This is the story of Harriet Hutchinson of East Braintree who waited, and the story of Lucius Salisbury of West Randolph who left Vermont when he was nineteen in 1843 to go to Missouri. He planned to make some money and return to Vermont within a year. He clerked for a time in his older brothers' store in St. Louis; he tried farming then worked in another store in Keytesville in central Missouri. He stayed nearly four years but he came back to marry his girl in the spring of 1847. While they were separated Harriet and Lucius corresponded, and their letters survive in the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

Harriet's letters are especially interesting because they reveal various aspects of social life in central Vermont in the 1840s and they document the incredible mobility of Vermonters in the nineteenth century. They also reveal the human story of a girl who had doubts and fears and moments of sadness, who did not want to leave Vermont and her friends, but who wondered if her man was ever going to return for her.

Harriet Hutchinson was an attractive, vivacious girl who stood five feet two inches tall and weighed 119 pounds. She was eighteen years old in 1843. Her father was a relatively successful farmer. Harriet was an intelligent observer; she describes the appearance of Stowe village in 1846, and a trip to Fort Ticonderoga. Her letters, however, only occasionally mention religion or politics. She seems oblivious to the slavery controversy, and although she comments on the Mexican War it is to urge her fiancé not to join the army. She mentions the coming of the railroad and reveals a prejudice against the Irish who built it. She comments on a change in postal rates and a change in the rules for

teachers. She is critical of the Millerites who predicted the end of the world. Most of all she gossips about her friends and relatives and worries about her distant fiancé. The letters are more interesting than they are important. Perhaps their chief usefulness is to illustrate that there were ordinary men and women with ordinary human problems living in an age often pictured as dominated by writers and politicians, by economic and intellectual forces.

Lucius Salisbury to Harriet Hutchinson September 12, 1843 from Providence Mills, Illinois.

I left home on Monday morning at one o'clock the 21st of Aug. for Woodstock Father accompanying me and arrived there about 9 o'clock in the morning, took the stage there at eleven for Castleton, rode all night and arrived at Troy on Tuesday about half past four . . . [*tedious journey that.*] It commenced raining about half past seven Monday morning and rained until I arrived at Troy. The coach being filled to overflowing I was compelled to ride upon the out-side with the driver and carry an umbrella: however I stood it quite well with the exception of getting badly drenched with the heavy rain of Tuesday morn. After tea at the Troy House I called for a room being very much fatigued and sleepy.

Lucius' brother Philander joined him at Troy.

. . . We left Troy next morning in the cars for Buffalo—Niagara Falls and arrived there Thursday night. I was very much struck at the splendid magnificent sight the falls afford. Many, many were the times I wished you at my side to view this truly sublime natural curiosity, but it could not be so.

We again took the cars Friday P. M. and returned to Buffalo, there remained until Saturday about eleven A. M. from whence we went on board a beautiful steamer, The Great Western. . . . At Green Bay we saw between 3 and 4 thousand Indians all dressed after their own fashion, some well dressed and others almost naked. . . . We were on the Lakes five days and . . . took the stage at Chicago for Peru arrived the next morning but just one hour to [sic] late to take the boat for Providence Mills. Being one hour to [sic] late we were compelled to stay there 4 days and nights with *Gnats Mosquitoes and Bed Bugs* by the scores. . . .

Harriet Hutchinson to Lucius Salisbury October 16, 1843.

. . . It must have been hard parting with your friends the morning you left. . . . I believe all the young people are going to the West, there has been quite a number that have started for the West or are intending soon to start. John Blodgett left the week after you did. I believe John and Abel Lyman and Alvin Flint started a few weeks ago. I suppose you have or will see them before you receive this. Ethan Amidon and Denison Pratt I suppose start this week for Michigan. I can not think who will go next, it cannot be young men for we cannot raise as many more in town as have already gone, I guess the old will have to go next. . . .

It has been quite healthy about here since you left excepting some very

bad colds that were taken at the camp meeting at Randolph. . . . They say that John Hutchinson, 3rd called at Mr. Samuel Mann's one fortnight ago last Sunday evening . . . that will make Mary feel *smart*. This is what makes big folks feel big to think they have a daughter that receives visits from a college educated person.

January 4, 1844

They are having a dancing school at W. Randolph this winter I have not heard who attends it. . . . It is leap year you know, we girls can have a chance. I presume there will be a great many weddings this year for the girls generally go ahead with their business, they are not, or at least some are not, as backward about such business as the men. The rule is that the ladies shall ask the gentlemen if they will have them, if they do not accept they have got to get them some nice dress. I expect to have a number of nice dresses if I ask anyone, for I cannot find anyone who will have me I presume.

Harriet and Lucius did not always agree and one of the areas of disagreement was politics. On July 14, 1844 Harriet wrote: "I received a paper from you a week or so ago with a picture of 'your Whig President' [Henry Clay] I wish I had the same of our president to send you, I would let you see what a *Smart Man* [James K. Polk.] we have."

In the same letter she lets him know that if he plans to live on a farm (he has mentioned it in a letter) he will get little help from her: "I hope you will not put much dependence in my taking the charge of the dairy for you know what work I should make with it. You are aware I have had a very indulgent mother one that has always taken the charge of her own work . . . I am willing to do the best I can and that is all I can do. . . ."

July, 21, 1844

She has heard that Lucius' brother Philander has come from Missouri and she expects to see him shortly.

I can almost hope it will not prove to be Philander but his brother that I am now addressing that I shall see tomorrow, but I fear tomorrow will come and . . . that he is in a distant land far from home and the friends of his youth. . . .

Laura [his sister] wished to know if I knew when you calculated to come home I told her I did not. Then she asked me if you had not sent for me. She says don't you go for he never will come home to see us if you do. If she knew how much I am opposed to people going off as Philander and Thomas wives did she would never feel afraid of my going to the West unless you come for me. No that is what I can never do.

August 19, 1844

Harriet is worried what Lucius' sister Laura may be writing to him about her.

I am perfectly willing she or any other should write to you anything they know to be correct or true about me, but I wish you to write back to me so that I can satisfy you that you may know whether it is correct or not. I am sure Lucius if you were here I should not be any more strict than what I am now. Your friends are watching me every chance they can get I suppose, but I do not blame them for that. I do not intend to practice any deception. . . .

They say A[bel] M. Lyman is not going to take Minora Gray back with him, that looks rather queer I think—I fear something will prevent him from ever taking her—delays are dangerous sometimes.

September 18, 1844

Abel Lyman says he told you he should give me a real *hugging* and *kissing* for you and said you did not say but what he might—has not put his sayings in performance yet but mentions it frequently, he thinks it plagues me.

December 1, 1844

. . . they have a ball in contemplation at Brother John's on Wednesday . . . they expect 25 couples to supper—it is possible there may be more—balls appear to be all the toast nowadays. Miller's project has failed¹, Millerism is pretty much down about here. I think it has done a great deal of injury—there were some that did not harvest their grain until very late if they have at all, they were so sure the world would come to an end this fall . . . and they should not want any more provision, therefore their families are made destitute. I cannot think there has been half the injury done by people attending balls as there has in their believing in the Miller doctrine. I had my fears about it, but never was a believer, very far from that.

She has heard that he is leaving St. Louis to go into central Missouri to farm, and reveals a certain provincialism about the Midwest.

When I came to hear you had gone 100 miles off and in such a savage place as some represent it to be you may judge what my feelings were. . . . Mother said to me one day that [your] father said you must not go any further off on to the prairies for it was so unhealthy, he told her I must oppose it. . . . Should you ever think it best to come back to Vermont to live do not think I should not like it because I have so often spoken about going out West. I wish to go where it is best for us. . . .

1. William Miller, born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts in 1782, migrated to Vermont and settled near Poultney. He was converted by one of the waves of revivalism that swept across Vermont in the early nineteenth century. He spent his days managing a two hundred acre farm but his evenings making careful mathematical calculations based on his reading of the bible. The end of the world would come in 1843, he announced. He was a successful revivalist minister and as 1843 approached he became more and more popular. He went on speaking tours and conducted huge camp meetings. He attracted large followings in rural New England and also in Boston, Philadelphia and the Midwest. But 1843 came and went and the world did not come to an end. Miller made some recalculations and announced that the end of the world would come on October 22, 1844. When again the world did not come to an end Miller's following diminished, but a few loyal Millerites organized the Adventist Church still arguing that the end of the world was near. The seventh Day Adventists split off from the parent group in 1846.

February 28, 1845

Her aunt has just died of typhoid fever in Morristown and she is dependent.

I am glad [to] hear that you are contented and pleased with your new place of residence. I hope you will take all the comfort you can—our life at best is one of much trouble and care. I should like to be the one to comfort and console you in your lonely moments. I suppose you have some as well as myself. I have spent my evenings at John's [her brother] excepting one or two evenings at neighbors, I should like to know how you have spent these long winter days and evenings? You did not tell who you have to keep house for you. You and Mr. Murry must keep back and not let the young ladies gain your affections for it may prove fatal.

June 30, 1845.

She has not written recently because she has had the measles and is waiting for the new postage bill with the cheaper rates.

If we have been tardy about writing we must make it up now whi'lst the postage is low.

. . . What have you written to F[ranklin] [his younger brother] that caused him to be afraid to show me some of your letters? I think you have written something for I could not get him to show me one. . . . I was sorry to hear that you had suffered so much with a pain in your finger, it is our lot to suffer much with pain and sickness. You spoke of coming to Vt. to live—if you could do as well it would certainly be much pleasanter, but we have got to work for a living and we must try to live in the best place for that.

September 13, 1845

The sores on his hands persist.

What can you assign for having such distressing sores? Is it the country or their manner of living that does not agree with you, there must be cause for your being afflicted in such a manner. I fear it is the country. I cannot think the Western country is healthy for our Vermonters.

She urges him to come home.

. . . You should not feel that you are obliged to be married as soon as you come for you are not. We had better wait until you can engage in some business that would suit you but we might enjoy ourselves so much better if you were here so we could see each other often, than what we can in this dull, dull way of conversing.

November 27, 1845 (Thanksgiving day)

. . . perhaps you have thought of the last Thanksgiving you spent in Vermont, of the hunting excursion with G. T. Blodgett, had I supposed that you would have left this state so soon I would have claimed your company that day. . . . you ask me if I will go out west with Philander and Mary if they should come out here next year and at the same time tell me not to say

I won't. . . . I hardly know how to answer you, but I will say abruptly I should prefer to wait until you can come to me. You have given your reasons for making such a request. I cannot doubt your sincerity—No I will not, you have been true to me both in prosperity and adversity and is not that enough to test you. But just think for one moment what would be my feelings to leave my home and go so far among strangers and you prove untrue? What disgrace it would bring upon me. . . .

In a letter written November 30, 1845 Lucius replies to her urgings that he come to Vermont to live.

You spoke of my coming to Vermont to live or to some of the New England States. I wish it were so that I could. There is one thing certain, we can live here cheaper, better and easier than in the New England states. I have not the least doubt but you would like this country better than the one you live in (setting friends aside) were you to live here a year or so. . . .

But Harriet replied on January 21, 1846:

If you had told me when you went away that you would stay three years or more I should not have believed you and should have been tempted to have told you not to come home at all. . . .

There has been much said about a railroad for one year past and has been some anxiety manifested about it—some wish to have it go through East R[andolph] and some through West R[andolph]. It was decided this week that it should go through West R[andolph]. Franklin said your father was so anxious to know about it that he could not write to any of you until he knew which way it would go. Now they are going to have a railroad you will come home soon and make a visit will you not. . . .

Nancy says you will never come back after me, why must they talk so?

March 26, 1846

Lucius urges her to come West with his brother and sister-in-law when they come to Vermont in the summer. She is undecided.

When I leave my mother to go out West if I should ever do so I shall not expect to see her many times more. I think she is very much altered since you went away. Some say it will kill her when I come to go away. I expect if I go out there I cannot come home every year and she is growing old and is liable to sickness. How often may I come home? Did you know that I should *tease, torment and plague* you sometimes. You have never lived with me and have only seen me now and then. . . . I wish to give you a warning so you will not be cross when you begin to realize it.

She is visiting in Stowe helping a friend get settled in a new house and describes the village.

. . . From my chamber window in the third loft I can see six dwelling houses, one school house, one store and can have a pleasant view of the branch of the Onion [Winooski] river as it runs down, down its never ceasing course . . . there is one grist mill, saw mill, clothing establishment and a

small factory. There are some farm houses and some pleasant farms—those that you admired so much when you went up to Morristown. It is not as pleasant here as it is in the summer, the hills are as yet thickly spotted over with snow, but a few such days as today will soon carry it off.

. . . Is the water as good to drink out there as it is here? Have you learnt to drink tea or coffee? Have you learnt to distinguish the different intoxicating drinks and do you drink them?

May 9, 1846

. . . In regard to your playing *Cards*. I am willing to have you play occasionally for the amusement of it, but do not want you to gamble. I can play with you. I know how, but I do not make a practice of playing.

She is lonesome for her friends in Stowe.

. . . I do not know how to be separated one days' ride from them. But that is nothing compared with the distance I may go from them, but I entertain hopes that you will yet come to Vt. to live and I [will] never be obliged to go so far from my friends, the more I think about going the worse I feel about it. . . . I am afraid the western country will not agree with me, it does not with many of our Vermonters. . . . I think females have stronger attachments than males, males are more fond of roving therefore their desire of seeing the country overbalances their desire to be with their friends. . . . I should prefer to live near my friends than to have all the riches of the far West. . . . Will you not come to Vermont and settle down before you engage in any permanent business?

. . . the first day and evening of May was [sic] very rainy, rather bad time for May parties. Do they make any account of the first of May in the country where you live?

. . . They have formed a new law about schools that teachers shall be examined before they shall be allowed [sic] to teach, it is very trying for some, they say they had rather give up the idea of ever teaching than to stand before a committee and be examined.

July 28, 1846

The Mexican War had begun on May 13, 1846 and Lucius has written that his brother Philander has volunteered, and he is thinking of also joining the army. "I see by the papers that the government has called upon Vermont for two regiments of troops to go south. I hope the Green Mountain Boys will not be found wanting." Harriet urges Lucius not to go into the Army.

. . . The lives of our people I think are worth more than that country with all its gold mines. . . . I know that you have so much of the soldier's spirit that I fear you will go regardless of friends should there be another call, but if you go you must go without my consent. I have this spring taken a trip across the Granville and Green Mountain to Shoreham and from there across Lake Champlain to Ticonderoga to visit the old fort where our forefathers fought for their liberty. There is something romantic and beautiful

on that spot although it is much decayed. I could not help thinking how many hard days work had been spent there to build that fort and how much blood there must have been shed.

. . . The 4 of July was not celebrated nearer here than E. Randolph there they had a school celebration, 6 towns I believe, they had dinner prepared for all that were there free of expense. There were a great many that went to the Springs at Williamstown, that has got to be a great place for people to resort to, both young and old. . . . Many thought more of that day this year on account of the Mexican War I presume.

. . . They are driving cars on the railroad in some places, in a few years, perhaps in one year, we shall be able to ride in the cars in Vermont, that will be great you know. I for one am sick of that business for I dislike to see so many Irishmen about, they have got their little house, up over on the branch, they do not look hardly habitable.

October 25, 1846

. . . I should have very bad feelings if you had gone to Mexico now they have had such a bloody battle and so many of our men killed. It is bad enough to have people die natural deaths without their going on to the battleground and then killing each other.

December 20, 1846

Finally they have agreed that he will come in the Spring, they will get married in Vermont and she will return with him.

. . . A sad accident happened in Randolph last week. Mr. Otis W—— was drawing a large log to mill and his sled slewed [sic], tipped over and he received a blow on his back and the log was on his head, and he was dead. It is not known which killed him the blow or the log on his head. There was another accident only a few weeks before. Ira Samson took two of Thomas L's boys out with him on a hunting excursion and they ran playfully around and he not thinking but what it was game in the bushes shot and shot one of the boys so he did not live but a short time.

. . . I shall not feel sorry to think this is the last letter for I never liked the plan of writing letters.

Lucius Salisbury and Harriet Hutchinson were married in East Braintree, Vermont on April 13, 1847. They moved to Keytesville, Missouri, where Lucius, at first in partnership with his brother and then with another man, ran a general merchandise business. In 1858 they moved to a farm eight miles east of Keytesville on a tract of land that he had previously purchased. In 1860 they laid out the town of Salisbury, built a store and a postoffice. During the Civil War Lucius was postmaster and Harriet his assistant. Despite the presence of Confederate guerrillas in the area, Harriet drove several miles each day to carry the mail. After the war the town of Salisbury grew and prospered. Lucius was appointed Presiding Judge of the County, elected to the Legislature and served nine terms. He was responsible for getting a railroad to go

through the town, and for planting shade trees along the main street. He purchased several farms in the area, which together with his store, provided a comfortable living. Harriet and Lucius had five children but two of them died in infancy. In 1892 they sold their property in Salisbury and moved to a farm in Kenton, Ohio. They lived to celebrate their Golden Wedding anniversary, but they never returned to live in Vermont.²

2. *Portrait and Biographical Record, Clay, Ray, Carroll, Chariton, and Linn Counties, Missouri.* (Chicago, 1893), 704-06.

