

Lucy Wetmore Gray to her sister Harriet

Panama [City]
Saturday evening

March 31st, 1849

Dear Sister Harriet,

I have been here now two days, and I feel quite rested from the fatigue of my ride across the mountains. I wrote a few lines to Mother the evening we arrived, in great haste, being informed that an express would go out next morning for Chagres, but I learned that it only went today. I was hoping it would go by the *Falcon*, but it is reported here that she has gone. The steamer *Isthmus* is to leave 6th of April and you will probably receive this by her. The morning we left Chagres there were three steamers lying in the harbor – the *C.C.*, the *Northerner* and a British steamer *Midway*. Two have arrived since besides the passengers of the *Galveston* numbering 180 which met with an accident and put into the bay of Honduras. Their passengers are taken off in vessels I believe, but there is no dependence to be placed on reports here. You need to not believe half you see in the papers concerning the *Isthmus*. There is a small paper published here by a number of gentlemen who have brought out a printing press. It comes out every Sat. I will send you a copy of it. There are a great many Americans here waiting to go up and the chance seems small for them to go up at present. It is thought there will be vessels enough here in the course of a month or six weeks. There was a small brig arrived this morning, but we have not yet heard whether she will go to SF to carry passengers or not. Another ship is in sight this evening and one or two more expected soon but it will take a long time to get all the people off who are already here. And they were constantly arriving. It is estimated that about 14 hundred persons are now waiting to go to SF. The *California* has not yet arrived. Captain Stout thinks she is detained for want of coal. The vessels that were to bring it may have had a longer passage than was expected. However, we hope he will soon be here. There would be great rejoicing if she were to come. It is fortunate for us that we secured tickets. No one should come without doing so. Captain Stout called on us last evening. He says he dined with Chauncey a few days before he left San Francisco. He promised to call and see me again. Mr. Atherton, who

is still here told Mr. Gray he would call to see me. Captain Tucker, who came out with us, may possibly have the command of the *California* on her second trip up, if so we shall be well taken care of. Mrs. F. was a day and a half coming over from Gorgona. I made one day's journey of it as I did not care about sleeping in a tent. Lily rode over horseback with a man to walk beside her to carry her over the worst places. She did not seem at all fatigued by her ride, well, I was completely exhausted, but I rode the whole distance in one day, on a terribly hard, trotting horse, and I was obliged to strain every nerve and muscle to keep in the saddle. I wish I could give you some idea of the mountains we rode over on our way. When we were at the top of some of the hills, it seemed a very dangerous thing to attempt to descend, and I confess I was a little fearful at first of being thrown from my horse, but it was wonderful to find how I gained confidence in my own abilities as a rider and my horse as a sure footed creature. After he had carried me up and down some dreadfully steep hills, I felt perfectly safe, but it required constant watchfulness on my part for I could not tell one moment what was before me the next. Perhaps the horse might have to step down some very steep place and I must brace myself back in my saddle, plant my feet firmly in the stirrups, and hold on with all my strength to keep from being thrown, or going uphill the horse would suddenly climb some steep place, and I must lean forward and hold fast to the saddle to keep my seat. I soon became accustomed to it and rode over the worst places without fear, but not without watchful care. I can assure you it is a rough ride tho' not a dangerous one at this season when it is dry, but it must be unsafe in the wet season. I think this road is impassible in the summer and fall. Some of the people wonder how such stories could have been written home by those who came out first, but I can concur how dreadful it must be to ride over such steep mountains as these in wet weather, where it is as much as the horses can do to carry you safely when the earth is dry and hard. I would not advise anyone to cross at any other season than February or March. I found my riding skirt just the thing - 6 yards calico cut half into the two breadths seamed together and hemmed on the ends, one selvage sewed on a belt button, the belt in front and take the middle of the bottom of the skirt and bring it forward and fasten it to the middle of the belt in front which forms a kind of pants, pin the ends around your ankles, and it makes an excellent riding dress where you are obliged to ride Spanish fashion. The horses are about as large as a small two-year-old colt in the States. Capt. Stout has just come in again to see us. He says Chauncey was a pupil of his in Spanish on the way up. He speaks it very well. Capt. Stout is a pleasant social man. We have just had a call from two Spanish girls, sisters of our landlady. One of them has beautiful eyes, black and sparkling and long, black, curling hair. They were dressed with taste, and their

language is musical when well spoken. Their manners are quite pleasing. The proprietor of the house is a German. He speaks English and Spanish. His wife is a native, a pleasant kind hearted woman who treats us with much attention. There is a band of ___ in the next room to us consisting of half dozen natives. We hear them listening to *Hail, Columbia* and *Yankee Doodle* with as much delight certainly as we ever did at home. Mrs. Fremont and I are sharing our landlady's room with her. It is the best one in the house, is on the third story and airy and comfortable. It is used as parlor and bedroom, has one large bedstead in it with a mattress on it, the only one in the house. The sheets and satin cover and pillowcases and curtains are trimmed with broad lace. This is taken off at night. The rest of the beds in the house are the single cots with sheets spread over them or hammocks. These are the only beds they have here excepting such as a few families are able to get for themselves. You cannot get even a blanket to sleep on to soften your bed. I found it rather hard after my fatiguing ride to have such a hard bed, but I slept just as soundly as if it had been the best bed in the world. In the warm climate it answers very well. The houses here look more like barns inside than like houses, great doors large enough for a yoke of oxen to pass through, a partition of boards put up between the rooms and whitewashed. Ours being in the third story extends to the roof. We see the rafters above us. The partition does not extend all the way to the roof. Consequently, we can hear with perfect ease all that is passing in the next room. The floors are all brick in this house tho' I observed wood floors in some. I have taken one walk about the city. It is all in ruins. There a great many old churches that have gone to decay; trees are growing up in the middle of them. They are all very large and must have been handsome at the time they were built, but now they are miserable looking and as ugly as possible. There is nothing about the town to remind one of home. It is a miserable looking place, altho' the best on the Isthmus.

Sidenote, page 1

I hear since I have written this letter that the *Isthmus* has not yet arrived, but it is expected soon. I cannot tell when you will get these letters as all we can do is to start them from Panama by private hands. We cannot send by mail from this place consequently, cannot buy postage. You need not feel at all anxious about us. We have found kind friends all the way and have enjoyed good health. I do not like living at sea and I'm glad we did not go round the Cape. Mrs. Fremont says she will send me some of her butter and cheese when she gets settled on her farm.

Sidenote, page 2

We are at the hotel yet, but intend to take rooms where we can live cheaper and better too and where we can be more quiet. Mr. Jacob has just heard of some rooms which he will go and see in the morning if he likes them. Mrs. Fremont and Lily have one, Mr. G and I another, Mr. Jacob and Dr. Dow another. We shall have our meals sent to us from a restaurant more to our liking than we get here.

Sidenote, page 3

Palm trees and cacao nut trees are common. We saw some very large and beautiful trees coming up the river and crossing the mountains and beautiful flowers in bloom. The word Chiquita is pronounced (Che Kita) accent on the second syllable. I in Spanish is always E. E is always A.

Sidenote, page 4

I could write ever so much if I felt like it. Shall send you another letter before we leave Panama. Goodbye. The Chagres river is as beautiful a stream as I ever saw. The only trouble in coming up is in finding a lodging place at night. If you have a covered boat, it is more comfortable to sleep on than the native huts but I do not think it is safe on account of the ____.

Your Affectionate sister

Lucy