

**Lucy Wetmore Gray**

To her sister

Panama [City]

April 22nd, 1849

Dear Sister,

This is the fourth Sunday I have spent in Panama [City] since I left home. I hoped by this time to have been nearly on route to San Francisco, but we are sometimes disappointed in our expectations. Our steamer has not yet arrived, and we do not much look for it at present. Capt. Stout thinks they have been detained for want of coal, as they only calculated for the coal ships to be five months from England, whereas it is altogether probable they might be six or seven. The crew may have deserted, but whatever the cause is, it is unfortunate for those who have tickets on her to be detained here both on account of the expense and liability to sickness, letting alone the advantage it would be in a business way to be at the place of our destination. But we are waiting patiently as we can for the arrival of the steamer *Panama*, which will (if it has as good a passage as the *C.C.* and the *O*) be here about the 5<sup>th</sup> of May and fortunate very fortunate it is for us that our tickets are dated as far as back as the 26<sup>th</sup> of December, the date of the earliest being the 20<sup>th</sup>. The *Crescent City* will be here about Thursday bringing another load of passengers some no doubt with steamer tickets for the *Panama* expecting to go immediately on. The \_\_\_ will bring passengers with steamer tickets also but those who have been here longest and whose tickets are of the earliest date will go first and those who come now will be disappointed as we have been in not being able to go right on. Unless the *California* should appear suddenly, Captain Stout take the command of the *Panama* when she arrives here. I should like to go up with him as he is a very good man as well as a prompt and energetic person. He came to see us quite often and inquired the state of our tickets and he said \_\_\_\_\_ we were safe enough for the first steamer whichever it may be. There are a great many here without steamer tickets, but there are nearly \_\_\_ vessels enough to take them all up to San Francisco. They are arriving every two or three days. Two fine ships came in this evening. Most of those which have come in are small brigs or schooners. Several have already

gone loaded with passengers. Every ship which leaves this port will be filled to overflowing. There are a great many here who have not the means of getting from this place to S.F. Not expecting to find such a state of things they have come unprepared for the expense of staying here or going up the coast. The expense of going up in sailing vessels is \$250 in some ships; in the best is 300. Some paid as high as \$350. Steerage passage \$200 and it is cheap as they can afford to go. Provisions are generally as high as they are in California. Mr. Aspinwall sends all the provisions for the steamer here from New York at an immense expense crossing the isthmus. From Gorgana to this place, expense of transportation is six dollars for every \_\_\_\_\_. Flour is brought from Chile and can be had at a reasonable rate \$15 per barrel but pork brought from the States is worth \$50 per barrel and many other things in proportion. At present this is as good a place for making money as California. Immense quantities of provisions are brought over the isthmus, but at a great expense. Did I tell you I saw Mr. Brewster in New York just as we were leaving. He told us a young man, Mr. Lardner, who had him in his employ was coming to Chagres in a sailing vessel. He had given him a letter to Chauncey. He arrived a few days ago and called on us. He had some few barrels of pork which he said he could sell at 50 per barrel. He has engaged passage on one of the ships which is to leave soon for S. Francisco. There is a great deal of travel now across the isthmus. Every week there are arrivals from the States by some ship or steamer. There are now probably more than ten thousand persons in Panama [City] waiting to go to S.F. In two months, the number will probably be lessened. Those who have come over since we arrived have had more or less showers on the way and not very small ones either. They are not like your gentle April showers. We have had but one in Panama but that was sufficient to show us that the rain does not fall very gently. On the other side of the mountain, there has been a great deal of rain. Showers come suddenly upon the traveler and unless he is well prepared for it, he gets a thorough drenching. We stayed at the hotel Americano a little more than three weeks but we have now taken two rooms in one of the best houses in the city and are living much more in accordance with our wishes than we were in the hotel. The cooking there is most of it horrible. You have no idea what sort of dishes they bring on the table. Most of them would be eatable if they were well cooked. Our breakfast was the best meal. We had always boiled eggs and generally good fish or ham, a good omelet and fried plantain or banana. These were our chief articles of food and were well cooked thanks to William one of the waiters from the C.C. who is thus far on his way to California and is supporting himself by being cook and waiter at the hotel. The bread was never good and butter - there is not such a thing in Panama as butter or milk. Our tea and coffee were not good and

without milk exceedingly unpalatable. The coffee I like better than the tea. Their dinners are horrid. There was little meat fit to eat, except the ham from the States. Yams are a good vegetable, and the only ones I could eat here. Tell Father I have thought of him every time I have sat down to a table. \_\_\_\_\_ Oh, if he were here in Panama he would think that rye bread a luxury even without butter. I have wished so much for hominy and milk. Oh, it would be so good here in the warm climate. I have thought of a great many other nice things I used to get at home too. Oh, if some dainty people could live here a week it would cure them I am sure. You know I never was dainty. All I want is good whole some food. As long as I was at the hotel, I felt as tho' I should eat my pick of diet before I should leave Panama. I used to think if I could only have one good slice of bread and butter or a bowl of hominy and milk I should feel as though I had fared sumptuously. I felt the want of wholesome food more while Mr. Gray was sick than any other time. About two weeks ago he had quite a violent attack of cholera morbus which completely prostrated him for a few days. He was gradually recovering from it, but as I could get nothing suitable for him to eat, and his appetite being pretty good, he ate things not suitable for him, and among these things a piece of pine apple which brought on a second attack not as violent as the first but much more difficult to cure. He is still weak and pale but slowly gaining strength. Day before yesterday he was able to walk from the hotel to this house about half the distance from home to Tim's. We obtained these rooms through Mr. Meachem of Baltimore who with his wife and daughter occupy the rooms on the opposite side of the hall from ours in the second story. They have been here a week. Mrs. Meachem is a nice, clever, and agreeable Connecticut woman. She has given Mr. Gray some arrow root which is an excellent thing for him. Mr. Lardner brought him a quart of rice, which I intend he shall live on at present with an egg which I beat every day for him with a little brandy in the absence of port wine which we ought to have brought with us. He has taken all the cherry bark and nearly all of the camomile I brought with me. One needs some sort of a tonic here all the while to keep them up in this climate. You have no idea what languid listless feelings it produces in one just from a cold climate. It is not uncomfortably warm here either altho' the sun is vertical now. Our rooms are always cool and comfortable. There is generally a fine air and the nights are as pleasant as one could wish. The air is always soft and mild, but I have not a particle of energy or strength. Indeed I have not been all together well for the two weeks past. It is difficult to keep the bowels in order. There have been a great many cases of cholera morbus and fever also. A young man was buried this afternoon, which makes the fourth American since we arrived. I wonder that not more are sick many so imprudent. We have preaching every Sabbath by Mr. \_\_\_\_ and good

preaching too. Capt. Stout does everything he can to make things right \_\_\_\_\_.

*Side notes page one:*

Father must not come till the railroad is partly done, which will be in eighteen months. Great care must be taken to keep out of the hot sun and \_\_\_\_\_. Many are made sick in that way and by eating imprudently.

The cheapest way is to get steamer tickets when they get established.

I shall be thankful if we get away from this place without any more sickness. It is a miserable place to be sick in. With care we hope to preserve health. We live on bread, ham, rice, yams, crackers, and things of that nature.

*Side notes page two:*

I am giving love to all my friends, particularly to Aunt Becca, Ann, Mary, Phebe, Sally, Martha, and Uncle Daniel, if he is in M, to E Hayden, and all the Saddle Hills cousins uncles and aunts and love to all other friends who inquire about us. Mr. Gray sends his love to all at home.

We may write again before we leave Panama, as I should say we shall for we should be here several weeks longer.

*Side notes, page 3:*

It would not be very pleasant, traveling alone this way, if you have no friends make some and keep with them.

I hope to hear from you as often as there is opportunity to send. Respects to Mr.\_\_\_\_, Robinson and Dow and all others who inquire for me.

*Side notes, page 4:*

I will write a half sheet to Rosina and enclose in this to save postage. Will you please enclose it in an envelope and send it to her. I have written to Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and Sargeant in Baltimore and to Cornelia from Gorgona, to you and Mother from Panama before this.

It is so expensive coming. If Charles has not left I would not advise until next winter.

Love to our East Windsor friends and to all others.

Your aff. Sister.

Lucy Gray