

SOURCE MATERIAL OF IOWA HISTORY

[Few Midwestern newspapers of the nineteenth century could afford the luxury of a "Washington correspondent." But many Washington residents delighted in writing long chatty letters to their hometown newspapers, letters which told of the military, political, and social life of the capital. Some half-dozen Iowans sent letters, with more or less regularity, to the Des Moines *Iowa State Register* during the years of the Civil War, when more than usual interest centered in Washington. One of the most regular of these correspondents was Mrs. John A. Kasson, whose husband served the government during 1861-1865, first as the First Assistant Postmaster General in Lincoln's cabinet, and then as Representative from Iowa's fifth congressional district. Signing her letters "Miriam," Mrs. Kasson detailed the life of the capital from the woman's viewpoint, with much space devoted to fashion, social events, and moralizing on the life about her. She also described the more outstanding political events and repeated the stories and rumors of war which were current from week to week. Her letters, covering some four years, are too voluminous to reproduce in full; only those parts dealing with the lighter side of Washington life in the midst of war have been selected for publication here.—EDITOR.]

AN IOWA WOMAN IN WASHINGTON, D. C., 1861-1865

[October 29, 1861]

. . . Houses are being fitted for winter gayeties, rich dresses and laughing faces pass on every side, and, as in the days of the Decameron, there will always be found a merry circle to drown care in bright jest and dance, even though death and momentous crises bound their thoughtless path. Washington is perfectly thronged with strangers, every nook and corner is occupied with officers and their families, and with lookers-on at this swiftly moving Panorama of life in the Capital. The turn of each twenty-four hours, even as the turn of the kaleidoscope, brings a new combination of bright and exciting interests; the mind cannot stagnate here, and neither can it settle — one perpetual whirl of events, changing, changing all the while — tears to-day, smiles to-morrow, meetings, partings, successes and

adversities! Washington is very well, very enchanting, when youth and health throb in the pulses, but to grow old here, to die here — ah, it would be the fate of the moth in the candle! One of the novel sensations of the times is to attempt to return some lady's call, and to find a guard stationed before the door of the fair Secessionist. He will deliver your card, it is true, but you may look upon that acquaintance as ended. It is droll to see how expert in tongue-guidance many women have become, since they are often called on in a most summary manner to give an account of words unadvisedly uttered.

The keen air of Autumn has reddened the leaves of the trees, and induced the gay and fashionable to don their dashing costume, so that what with nature and art, our Avenues and Parks are more than ever gorgeous. For bright epaulettes and uniforms sparkle and shimmer in the sunlight, and pealing bands of martial music add to the effect of this display, until the eyes are dazzled, and the weary heart finds in the thought of *Vanitas, vanitatum*, almost a relief. The President's Mansion has been re-fitted for the winter, and Mrs. Lincoln's carefully selected wardrobe has met the approval of connoisseurs in such matters, so "they" say! and "they," as we all know, is a very important personage. . . .

The hospitals are full of sick and wounded now, and among the faithful nurses, I often hear mentioned the name of Mrs. Fales of Iowa. . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Nov. 13, 1861.]

[November 18, 1861]

. . . The city now is a huge crowd, and the strivings and pushing for houses and rooms, afford a laughable contrast to the panic of last summer, when the "white feather" certainly predominated. Many families at that time rented their furnished houses for merely nominal sums, and now the demand for accommodations is so pressing, that one cannot help pitying the rueful faces of those who might have made small fortunes had they not been too readily scared by southern braggadocio, and anticipation of Jeff Davis' dread presence! The churches that were sadly empty during warm weather, are crowded to overflowing. The Rev. Dr. Butler had resigned his charge at Trinity, owing to the disaffection of his southern sympathizing parish, but this right loyal and influential minister of the gospel, has consented now to remain until Easter, and will not be willing to receive any compensation for his services, excepting the Sabbath collections. These,

however, in so large a church, I hope will not prove insufficient. The church of the Epiphany is crowded always, the fine singing being also a great attraction. The Rev. Dr. Pyne, whose loyalty is unrivaled, preaches to a full congregation, in good old St. John's. . . .

To the looker-on, Washington becomes more and more like a great fair. Amusements are now the order of the day, circuses, theatres, concerts and all kinds of recreation. A beautiful young actress, Miss Josephine Chestney, I am told, is the rising star of the theatrical world. . . .

On the avenue, some speculators have placed a telescope with the advertisement, "five cents to look at the stars, ten cents to look at the moon!" So you see money-making, and gaiety, thrive by all means, in Washington. I am sorry to see that many families intend to entertain very generally this winter. Indeed, it is no time to expend money in dress or extravagance, for the sick soldiery, and the poor, will claim every care this coming season of suffering. But as it is no affair of my own, it is worth while to criticise the "gay world" which must live its butterfly life, though it be but for a day.

. . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Nov. 27, 1861.]

[December 2, 1861]

The chill and drear look of winter is fast creeping over Washington. Fragrance from rose and honey-suckle no longer fills the air, and pealing bands but rarely now add cheer to day and night. The soldiers are working hard to render their winter quarters comfortable, and ladies are knitting socks and mending garments in order to make the volunteers well cared for during the coming season. I think every woman will have her hands full of work for months to come, what with sewing for the troops and the poor, and it is no unusual thing to hear young and old declare that last year's cloak and bonnet must serve another season, since every dollar saved from useless expenditure is a gain to some sick or suffering person. Miss Dix [Dorothea L. Dix, Superintendent of Women Nurses] informed me to-day that the soldiers are really suffering for flannel shirts, and she seemed quite annoyed that quilts instead of blankets were sent for the regiments from their friends and sympathizers. Miss Dix observed that quilts were heavy in the wagons, and contained but little warmth. She gave me a list of clothing necessary for a soldier, and if the Iowa ladies ever club together to fit out a regiment they had better allow for each man two pairs of heavy

yarn socks, two pairs of canton flannel drawers, two flannel shirts, one pair very stout shoes, and a blanket. Also, a woolen comforter to protect the mouth and throat, and two pairs of yarn mittens. I know a lady over seventy years of age who is spending all her time and much of her income in sewing and knitting for the soldiers. Ladies buy the machine knitting, which comes in long tube-shaped pieces. These they cut off to the right length of a sock, and rip open a place into which they knit the heel and toe. . . .

As I write, a crowd of men and soldiers fly pell-mell after some prisoners who have burst from the guard house. The fellows are re-captured and bound, and some are wounded in the scuffle, but all has become quiet again during the ten minutes I have laid aside my paper to observe them. The men have just been paid off, and to-day a goodly group were seen under guard, street cleaning, or standing on barrels, or log shouldering, the latter boys being so happy in their tipsiness that they perform most extraordinary passes with their billets of wood, accompanying the same with novel and agile steps on the light fantastic toe. I have to laugh right heartily at this sight, although if one pauses to reflect, it is certainly a very disgraceful one. . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Dec. 11, 1861]

[January 4, 1862]

. . . It is the custom of Washington for a great many ladies to receive calls and keep open house upon Christmas day, for their lady friends as well as the gentlemen. So many families are boarding here that it is something of a treat to be entertained in a home-style; and these Christmas receptions where rich chocolate and strong coffee abound, contrast very favorably with Washington boarding house fare. . . . How the old and young darkies roll their eyes and duck their heads at you with "Christmas giff, Massa," as you go to your breakfast, and to church, Christmas morning! Woe be to you, if you have not a pocket full of quarters, for you've no claim to "quality" in a negro's estimation if you cannot at this happy season, cross each extended black palm with silver. . . .

On New Year's day the sun shone beautifully, but the dust rose in heavy clouds along the crowded streets. Everybody went to see everybody, and the greetings of the day seemed unusually heart-felt and sincere. I am told the Iowa gentlemen were paying their respects to their friends; and I also

heard it observed by one who met them, that their State might well be proud of such a fine band of Hawkeyes. . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Jan. 15, 1862]

[January 16, 1862]

. . . I hear the Band serenading the new Secretary of War [Edwin M. Stanton]. I think of this changing scene in the midst of which I live, and moralize until I find my mind perplexed and my heart discouraged. Within the same hour one is called on in Washington to listen to such opposite opinions! I sat to-day talking an hour with Gen. and Mrs. [John C.] Fremont; soon after with those who bitterly oppose them. My heart sickens. Where will all this end? Do you want to know how "Jessie" looks and seems in the midst of her trials? Whatever may be thought of him (Fremont) let every one honor the wife who so nobly shares her husband's anxieties, and stands at his side strong in love, in will, and energy, to help him to the utmost of her power. The spirit of old Col. [Thomas Hart] Benton looks out of "Jessie's" eyes. The bright flush of her cheek, the sweet play of her lips, when seconded by the clear ideas of her powerful mind, render her captivating to a remarkable degree. She has scarcely slept or rested since she came to Washington. To see her Husband vindicated, is the restless burning of her soul, and she is mistress of every statistic, every item, that can weigh for or against him, and it is easy to see by the dilated nostril and flashing eye, how wholly she believes in Fremont's integrity, and resents his accusers' charges. Ah, well I can remember when she stole from her father's house to become the bride of the man whom she has so nobly followed for better, for worse. She was so handsome and gay, and now she appears like some Roman Matron, full of dignity and high resolve. . . .

In the meantime the wheels of society roll on. The President stands, gaunt and care-worn, receiving his friends in the gilded departments of the White House. The crimson and gold tapestry, the golden cables and tassels overhang pale weary faces, sparkling, laughing faces, and shrewd, treacherous ones alike. The brazen trumpet tones peal out their heavy march, or bewildering waltz, and music and lights, crimson and gold painfully contrast with the worn look of statesmen, the discontented grumbler, or the disloyal agitator. . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Jan. 29, 1862]

[February 5, 1862]

Today is "Cabinet calling" day for Ladies: That is, on every Monday the wives of the Cabinet officers receive their friends; also Mrs. McClellan [Major-General George B. McClellan] is at home on this same day. . . .

A number of years ago, Washington saw just such a dreary, rainy, muddy season as this, and it was called John Randolph's winter, because that gentleman had the curiosity to count the clear days, and there were just fifteen. Now, the Cabinet Ladies have had to receive their calls all winter on just such unpardonable mornings as this, and there is something ludicrous in the sight of long processions of carriages swimming up to the crowded doors, and something doleful in the sight of spattered silk dresses and ermine cloaks. One becomes used to everything, so the ladies laugh at mud spots and condole with each other at the envious wheels that will pay tribute!

I will invite my friends to join me in a round of calls to-day. Any three can go, only let them be prepared to sacrifice the handsome dresses they in imagination don. And now we will suppose ourselves driving off, the soft mud flying into our faces, our light gloves are already stained in the instinctive motion of wiping spatters from our eyes. But never mind, to-day we must go, if we cannot wait until next Wednesday, and trifles shall not deter us. Besides, the streets are thronged with muddy carriages like our own, and we laugh at some one still more unfortunate than ourselves, as they gather up the ruined flounces. First to Mrs. Seward's [Secretary of State William H. Seward]. The liveried colored dignitary at the door takes our card, hands it to "contraband" No. 2, who passes it to No. 3, who places it in the silver card-receiver, at the same moment ushering us in (names clearly pronounced), to the presence of Mrs. Seward. Here we are gently and sweetly welcomed, and "contraband" No. 4 hands chocolate and cake immediately. We find the parlors already filled, and having said our few words of greeting, we make our bow and return to the carriage. Here we all eagerly discuss the call, unite in approval of everything, and have our cards in readiness for the next reception. This will be Mrs. Caleb Smith's [Secretary of the Interior Caleb B. Smith], and we find there an elegantly set table, salads and all good things, and while on our way to Mrs. Welles' [Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles] we decide that this was a very pleasant visit. While Mrs. Welles is making us quite at home in her friendly manner, we take a good look at the Navy people who sur-

round us, and conclude afterwards that Cabinet calling is right pleasant work, for the wives of Naval officers are proverbially gracious and courteous of demeanor. The crowd rolls on, and we with it. We take a glass of wine at Mrs. Blair's [Postmaster General Montgomery Blair], admire the queenly dignity of Miss Chase [daughter of Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase], enjoy a delightful talk with the kindly family of Mrs. Bates [Attorney General Edward Bates], and then drive on to pay our respects to Mrs. McClellan and Mrs. Stanton [Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton]. The latter is very handsome, and receives her friends with easy dignity. — But we linger at Mrs. McClellan's loth to leave the pleasant parlors, the bright conversation, and the brilliant assemblage. No refreshments are here — the crowd is too great to admit them, but every one asks to see the baby, which is a *real* baby, a Daughter of the Regiment, and little Miss McClellan cooes and laughs at her mother's guests, and gets more kisses than usually fall to the share of so young a lassie, while the old nurse laughs and cries, "and isn't she a lovely daughter of the Regiment?" We have been all through our Cabinet calls in a little while. We have enjoyed them so that we are not cross at the mud stains, and agree that our Republican Cabinet can boast of very lovely ladies to represent the Women of America.

Now for one or two evening receptions. These are most pleasant of all. The dress required for the occasion is very simple, just what one chooses, and the society drawn together is delightful. On Thursday evening Speaker [Galusha] Grow receives. Here we find a large crowd of Senators and Members and their wives. The old ladies vie with one another in point laces; the young ones dress as they please, a simple white waist and silk skirt and corsage being the most approved style. Here we have music, and coffee, and conversation. Gen. Fremont and Lady, Gen. [Nathaniel] Banks, everybody in so-called "society" attends the receptions of Mr. Grow. No meetings can be more informal or more agreeable, and although Mr. Grow is a Bachelor, his sister-in-law does the honors of the house most charmingly. . . .

To-night Mrs. Seward gives a large party, and next week Mrs. Lincoln does the same. . . .

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, Feb. 19, 1862]

[February 20, 1862]

. . . The *Herald* and *Tribune* told of Mrs. Lincoln's great party, but the prettiest ladies there were not mentioned, even "Jessie's" presence was not spoken of, and many other interesting items were ignored, quite rightly too, for what is the use of telling everything, when some things are forgotten? The President and his Lady were anxious in the midst of the festivities, for their little son was ailing. A physician constantly came to Mrs. Lincoln's side to re-assure her with regard to the boy. To-day it is thought the little fellow must die, and very heavy are the hearts in the house so recently the house of feasting, so soon, it may be, to turn to the house of mourning. . . .

Feb. 21 — Last night at a large and brilliant party I found myself moralizing, and I will tell you why! The guests assembled were nearly the same as those who lately met under the White House roof at the recent festivity held there. The band played stirring music, the dancers flew hither and thither, and through the hall there stole from one to the other the whisper "Mrs. Lincoln's child is dead!" Did any pause to think of that desolated dwelling? Did any give a tear of sympathy? Alas! the laugh was just as loud, the dance as giddy, while [in] my own heart rung again and yet again the words, "better the house of mourning!" . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, March 5, 1862]

[March 5, 1862]

To-day the Ladies of the Cabinet declined receiving calls as a token of respect to Mrs. Lincoln. The White House is sad and still, for its joy and light have fled with little Willie. He was a very bright child, remarkably precocious for his age, and had endeared himself to every one who knew him. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln are very affectionate and devoted parents, and their devotion to the sick child was untiring. . . . Mrs. Lincoln has of course been the subject of criticism, for what lady in high social position can escape it! But she is possessed of great firmness of character, and has gone on doing what seemed to her best under all circumstances, and of course, while some are pleased to find fault. But I have never yet heard of any other than amiable traits in Mrs. Lincoln, and she certainly appears with ease and elegance as the Lady of our President. I think the Secesh ladies here were positively vexed that we did not have an awkward, ill-dressed representative of Republican Ladies, and Mrs. Lincoln's fine deport-

ment and handsome toilette have taken the "F. F. V.'s" somewhat by surprise. . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Mar. 19, 1862]

[March 12, 1862]

. . . Lent has put very little stop to the gaities. A pretty lady told me that when she comes to Washington, she puts her conscience in her pocket. I warned her to beware of pick-pockets for that conscience was an article easily lost here, and not to be recovered for the "no questions asked." But while our clergy are so intensely fashionable at the Capital, who can blame the laity? . . .

The day before Ash Wednesday, Miss Chase gave a very brilliant matinee. The ladies went in opera bonnets and spring costumes. The band played finely and a beautiful collation and plenty of flowers were at the disposition of the guests. The evening of the same day Mrs. Welles gave a brilliant party. . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Mar. 26, 1862]

[April 10, 1862]

Ho! for Fortress Monroe! for Newport News! for Hampton Roads! for a good time generally! The *King Philip* lies at the Navy Yard, a Government boat at our service. A few hours to get ready, a few cart loads of good things to eat, drink and be merry withal (got up at private expense), a large party of ladies and gentlemen, statesmen and literati, among whom were Vice President [Hannibal] Hamlin and family, many Senators, Representatives, and distinguished persons! The deck is crowded with happy faces, and with loud cheers we start for glorious Old Point, though the snow begins to fall and in an hour or so we are all compelled to retreat to close cabins, dependent on the goddess of good humor for our main solace. But maugre wind and rain, maugre the "lying by" ten hours for the storm, sea sickness and other casualties, we laughed and jested to our heart's content and set our faces as a flint toward Old Point Comfort. Sunday afternoon, all hands were on deck. You might as well have tried to keep cork under water, as to have prevented our catching the first glimpse of Fortress Monroe. We had rather a damp appearance, it is true, but the rain was nearly at an end, and not much of it opposed us now. There lay the Rip Raps, a huge pile of stones, spreading off into the water and in the midst

our Flag. On every side we were surrounded by Transports, laden with troops, horses and forage. Handkerchiefs waved, cheers resounded, and we put into the wharf all alive with eagerness for what was to come. *En masse*, we made our way to Gen. [John E.] Wool's head quarters. The gallant chief received us as cordially as we could wish, and with him for our guide we walked around the Ramparts, neither mud nor rain deterring us. There lay the *Monitor* in sight. Nobody said much about her; every one thought; but wisely withheld expression. It was very raw and cold, and with the exception of Gen. Wool, whose blood seemed youngest of all, we were shivering and shaking, and trying to forget discomfort. A return to the boat was inevitable, at least for the ladies, and we went aboard rather gloomily, forboding a dull morrow. Monday morning crept in, dark and chill. Breakfast over, and now what next? As if he had purposely withheld his rays until then, out burst Old Sol, and with his shine dispelled our gloom. Oh, what a glorious day! We are bound for Newport News — come aboard with us in imagination and steam up the River to the scene of glory! [The famous fight between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac* had taken place on March 9, 1862.] See, in the distance, a wreck looms from the water! It is the *Cumberland*! [sunk by the *Merrimac* on March 8] Our hearts beat quickly; no word is spoken. Nearer we glide, and lo! the Stars and Stripes! Floating, panting to the breeze, our banner, our torn flag, waving, God be thanked, "o'er the home of the free!" . . .

And now for Newport News, conducted by the officers of Gen. Wool's staff, who, together with their splendid brass band, paid us the compliment of accompanying us from the Fort. We were presented to Gen. [Joseph] Mansfield, and greeted with seventeen guns in honor of Mr. Hamlin. Aha! that will warn our opposite neighbors of what a fine prize they might possibly catch, and we know that just as we are spying on them through our glasses, they were watching us. The great hole made in Gen. Mansfield's house by the enemy's cannon during the *Merrimac* fight, does not reassure the timid. We take our leave of Newport News with our hands full of relics, ropes from the *Cumberland*, the celebrated ink-bottle that had its top knocked off by the cannon shock and never surrendered (a proof that black blood will stand fire), and we are now making for Hampton Roads. The burned town gains from us pity for our enemies, and we linger only long enough to bewail the treason which is bringing down on every rebel head a full destruction. And now for the *Monitor*.

We draw up alongside the little black defender, and board her, laughing at the comical appearance she presents. One look into her turret, and we are silent. Awe takes the place of our dubiety and we proceed to examine this masterpiece of science, learning at every step the mighty wonder of her power. Who can describe this magic vessel, which, cold and repellent in exterior, cannot be rivalled for comfort and elegance within? We enter the turret, stand by the big guns, and we kiss them, Mr. Editor, for their hard, big iron mouths are wonderously handsome in our eyes! Women love strength and defense, and many a fresh lip pressed the good guns of the *Monitor*. The Captain took a hammer and cracked away a piece of iron from the vessel, and I guard it as a precious gem, within my jewel box. And now, while we are again gathered upon the iron deck, we call the band aboard, and send a boat for Gen. Wool. We wish to receive him on the *Monitor*, and as he approaches "Hail to the Chief who in triumph advances," bursts from the band. The General is now received by Mr. Hamlin, and we gather about him, while the Vice President makes a most eloquent and touching address to the Old Chief. Then follow cheers for the General, cheers for his Staff, for Ericsson, for the *Monitor*, and every thing and every body, and what with the music, the crowd of glittering officers, I assure you we had a fine time! Having taken a kindly parting from General Wool, we set out for the *Minnesota*. [Flagship of the Union fleet.] When quite near her, several fine boats were sent to convey us to her. We found the officers prepared for our reception, the vessel in splendid trim, and all on board ready to welcome us. Conducted by Commodore Goldsboro [sic. Louis M. Goldsborough] and Captain Van Brunt, we examined every part of the huge ship. We talked with the wounded sailors who had been taken from the *Congress* and *Cumberland*, and when we left the *Minnesota* we felt fully repaid for our fatigue. "When you reach your own boat keep your eyes on the ship," said Capt. Van Brunt, and when safely aboard the *King Philip*, we looked diligently at the *Minnesota*. Suddenly from the great ship's sides poured the salute to the Vice President — seventeen guns booming on the air. The order to "man the yards" was given, and like a troop of squirrels the sailors ran up the ropes, filling every part of the rigging! As we stood there, the gallant tars lifted their caps and gave three hearty cheers for "King Philip's party," and so we bade farewell to the *Minnesota*. . . .

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, Apr. 23, 1862]

[July 10, 1862]

. . . The young girls of Washington have been getting up private Fairs for the benefit of the Hospitals. The invited guests who "accept" are expected to buy from the fancy table spread in the parlor, or from the flower table or the refreshment room. At Secretary Smith's house one of these Fairs was held last evening. The flower table was perfect. Some of the baskets sold for \$25. One large basket was filled with dark moss in the center, and the word "Union" imbedded therein, while around the edge was a broad, full wreath of exotics. The Magnolia Grandiflora was displayed in great perfection. This white flower, as large as a lady's two hands held together, has a thick white leaf, upon which may be written sentences with a pen or pencil. The Southern youth, when avoiding anxious mama's observation, sometimes write very tender love letters to their sweethearts upon the magnolia leaf, and thereby elude the vigilance of the uninitiated observer. Among other pretty objects at the Fair, was a nice stand, with a basket of moss and flowers for the base, a globe of gold and silver fish for the center, and a basket of ferns above the globe of fishes. From three to four hundred dollars are sometimes made at these exclusive little fairs, for gentlemen go expecting to give not less than five dollars and some have given ten times that sum. There are no parties now — a few pic-nics, but the principal interest among the ladies is preparation for sea-side visits. . . .

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, July 18, 1862]

[December 13, 1862]

. . . The wife of Secretary Smith has put in train a pleasant plan for Christmas. All the soldiers, in all the hospitals in Washington, are to have a Christmas dinner, a banquet. — Twenty thousand homesick soldiers, all to have Christmas cheer. Mrs. Lincoln will provide for one hospital, different ladies for others, and in this way all will be cared for. Mrs. Lincoln does not receive calls, excepting in the evening. The Cabinet Ladies, I hear, do not intend having receptions. . . .

To-day, Mrs. Harlan [Senator James Harlan of Iowa] and others start for the scene of conflict, with large amounts of hospital stores. [The battle of Fredericksburg was taking place at the time this letter was written.] Great preparations are made for the wounded. I cannot tell you what a nervous state of anxiety there is here — the sun shines, the air is full of happy sounds, the hand organs play "Old John Brown," and the children

sing with them; yet no one forgets for an instant that terror and death are at hand. Secessionists look very gloomy. That is a good sign for us. . . .

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, Dec. 23, 1862]

[December 23, 1862]

. . . Every one is cast down about the Fredericksburg repulse. The streets are full of poor, jaded, unpaid soldiers, and often they are so weary they sit on the pavements to rest before they can walk another step. It is a sight to make any eyes weep, those tired heroes, lonely and homesick, wounded or exhausted.

Preparations for the Christmas dinner for the Soldiers go on extensively. Mrs. Harlan, Mrs. Melville Hoxie, and other Iowa ladies do what is in their power to help the suffering at the Hospitals.

Mrs. Lincoln is laying aside her mourning. She will receive calls on New Year's in black velvet, trimmed with thread lace. . . . The fashions this winter are very comical, the height of ladies' bonnets being absolutely ridiculous. Large white muslin bows with lace-trimmed ends, are worn instead of breast-pins on cloaks and walking-dresses. This has the effect of making ladies look quite ministerial. Cloaks are pretty much all long sacks, and braided trimmings are most in favor. Frizzled hair is all the rage. Ladies cut their lovely locks about four inches long, and curl them at night over the forehead and close to the head. These curls are all combed through in a mass next morning, and stand out like darkey's hair, precisely. I have seen many a dark-skinned woman try as hard to get the kink out of her hair, as our ladies try now to get it in. . . .

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, Dec. 28, 1862]

[December 28, 1862]

Washington has seen a Happy Christmas this year. Kris Kringle has been more than ordinarily liberal in his gifts, and our beautifully adorned churches, the Christmas trees seen in private dwellings, the grand feasts given to the soldiers in the Hospitals, all argue an abundance unlooked for at this time of Civil War. . . .

Our Hospital soldiers had a glorious day. It was a nervous time, though, for just the day before Christmas it was pretty justly feared that there would not be nearly enough provisions for the men. Mrs. Secretary Smith had worked very hard to obtain money and supplies, but a check that was supposed by her to be \$1,000 turned out to be only \$100, and so in differ-

ent ways she found herself disappointed and perplexed. Then began the sure signs of human nature and old Adam among some of the discontented fair sex: "I always said it was too much to undertake. Poor soldiers, to give them hope of a dinner, and then not feed them," &c., &c., words calculated to wound and dishearten the ladies upon whom the responsibility of success or failure must rest. But fortunately other ladies stepped forward heartily, with purses ready, and cheering words, and a great lot of Turkeys and Chickens arriving from Pittsburg[h] in the nick of time, made all hearts happy, and took all fear of scanty fare away. Very soon such a smell of Christmas arose from the Hospital kitchens and dining rooms, that the poor boys, homesick and wounded, could see home in the roast goose smoke, and better fancy the home hearth-stone, and the "house-mother" and the little happy children than they could have done without the aid of Mrs. Smith and her kind assistants. And the dinners were handsome, too! No cold-bit look about them. Candied pyramids, fruits, jellies, and other good things were quite as profuse as the more solid edibles. Then while the men were charging knives at double quick, in came Old Abe, first to one Hospital then the other, with Mrs. Lincoln smiling and friendly, and many a word of cheer was spoken by our noble President, and many a coat-sleeve wiped many a homesick fellow's eyes, as they listened to honest Abraham's unvarnished words of kindness. . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Jan. 4, 1863]

[January 12, 1863]

The interest and entertainments of the past week have been almost entirely devoted to the good of our soldiers. I cannot refrain from telling you of the successful exertions of a young Northern lady, who has accomplished one of the best works yet attempted for the pleasure and entertainment of the Hospital invalid. The young girl to whom I allude possesses a very fine voice, and sings patriotic songs with a fervor that delights every listener. She has been in the habit of visiting the Hospitals accompanied by her sister and other friends, and she will sing by the hour to the poor homesick fellows, ballads, battlesongs, &c., until she leaves them cheered and comforted by her sweet singing. After a time it occurred to her that a library for the sick men and convalescents would be acceptable to them, since she had noticed some difficulty in supplying them with papers and books. — So with characteristic energy she went to work to collect volumes, first by herself,

and then with the aid of friends, until now she has over 2,000 interesting books at their disposal. She has acted as Librarian, and her kindly manners have endeared her to all who have met her. Within a few days she has succeeded in getting a Bill through Congress granting a lot on Judiciary Square upon which should be erected a large wooden building for a Soldier's Library. A few days after, this noble young lady gave a public Concert at Willard's Hall, assisted by other amateurs, and was rewarded by obtaining half the sum needed for her new building. The Concert will be repeated next week. I do not know when I have been more gratified at such an instance of philanthropy in so young a person. . . .

Speaker Grow's evening receptions began last Friday. These are without question the most pleasant entertainments in the gay or fashionable world during this season. There is no dancing, but always animated conversation and delightful refreshments. Mrs. Grow has rendered herself wholly popular, and society regrets sincerely that Speaker Grow was not re-elected this year past. Owing to the number he had influenced to enlist, and also to the fact that he was very ill during the campaign, he lost his election, and his numerous friends seem to regret the fact far more than he does himself.

Mrs. Lincoln received morning calls on Saturday, and will continue to do so throughout the season, that is to say until Congress rises. . . .

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, Jan. 21, 1863]

[February 16, 1863]

The Capital, for want of a greater cause of interest, has been fain to be pleased and diverted with the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Stratton, alias Tom Thumb, and his little wife. — They remained here three days, and were much noticed and feasted. I had the honor of two invitations to meet their "lownessess" for "highnessess" would be an inexpressive term. One party was at the President's House, the other at Willard's. As illness prevented my meeting the distinguished Lilliputians, I must quote the description of their attractiveness, given by my friends. A distinguished Brigadier General, whose room at Willard's adjoined that of the little couple, being only separated from them by a thin door, was warned of their arrival by hearing a piping, mouse-like little voice exclaim, "My Dear, it is impossible for me to find my brush and comb," and a small voice replied emphatically, "*Women* never do know where to find anything, my dear!" During the party at Willard's, the small pair entered the Hall and delighted the as-

sembly with their handsome dress and pleasing manner. Mrs. Stratton is truly pretty, *embonpoint*, and merry. For my own part, I do not much enjoy the notoriety made by any unnatural physical cause, so I cannot write with much enthusiasm of the Bride and Groom. Some one addressing Madam as "Mrs. Thumb," her spouse straightened himself and indignantly said, "*Mrs. Stratton*, if you please!" At the President's, Mr. Lincoln and Tom Thumb were indeed the "long and the short of the matter," and Brobdignag and Lilliput seemed realized. — Mrs. Stratton, I am told, remarked to a lady at the Hotel, that "until she met Mr. Stratton, she had never seen her ideal of a man." The Bridal party were accompanied by Mr. Wells, their agent, and the Bride's *petite* sister, her maid, and her brother who is a soldier in our army. They have all left Washington now, and the citizens and strangers remember them kindly.

The city is very gay now, but as Lent is so close at hand, it is to be hoped that useless expenditure of time and money, during this War season, will cease. Illness has prevented me from taking part in the gaities of the Capital, and therefore it is principally from hearsay that I know of the extravagant dressing and lavish expenditure of our Ladies. — But I have seen enough to realize that War does not lessen love of show, or richness of apparel. Having to *chaperone* a very lovely Belle lately, I took special notice of her dress that I might describe it to my lady friends. — It was white silk, long train, with the first over dress of puffed tulle, and above that a tunic of gold-sprigged lace, decorated with wheat sheaves and field flowers (artificial and French, of course) with wheat and poppies, and lace ornamenting the long pointed corsage. The hair was dressed very high on the head, and rolled over cushions, roll above roll, as is the fashion now, with scarlet poppies just above the forehead. This was the prettiest dress I have seen this winter.

The "Hotel Circle" is the gayest of all, and I have seen so many persons come to Washington with virtuous horror of its follies, and strong resolves to withstand them, and set a shining example of resistance to worldly wiles, and I have so invariably found these daughters of Eve borne by the tide of Washington bewilderment, that I listen quite composedly as I hear of Theatre-going, dancing, &c., on the part of these same "example-setters." . . .

The season is nearly over, and Congress hurries its work rapidly. The galleries are crowded with ladies, and the House of Representatives becomes more and more a scene of absorbing interest. By the way, there are a

number of Members of Congress who seem never to forget the galleries. It is really laughable to learn in a short time who are the gallery members. I always expect to see certain faces, passing in the galleries, laughing and jesting and conversing with their lady friends. I find myself not looking in such and such a seat on the floor for the Hon. Gentleman from such and such a State, but my eyes turn at once around the galleries, if I happen to think of their names, and there you may be sure to find them. As Statesmen, the gentlemen must be of light weight. Whatever their attractions are as beaux, others must judge; but I confess to honoring those gentlemen the most, who attend to their desks and "Mr. Speaker," and forget the Mrs. and Miss Speakers, up stairs.

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, Feb. 25, 1863]

[March 9, 1863]

No one can imagine, who has not witnessed it, the confusion at Washington consequent upon the rise of Congress. Everything is hurried into the last week of the Session, and the performance of each day's duties is a task equal to a month's work at another part of the season. The Bills crowded through Congress must be accepted *per force*, as a compensation for all the squandered time of the winter. In social matters, the same rule holds good. Every one who has not given a party, gives one now. Each evening has its three and four entertainments. Carriages are flying through the mud or dust, and ladies' cards are left in all directions, "*pour prendre conge*." . . . The other evening I attended a very brilliant party at the house of an aristocratic Boston Member, where were gathered distinguished Generals, Lord Lyons, and other Diplomats, Members of the Cabinet, &c. &c. And who else do you suppose? Guess, and guess again! Not right yet? Well! who indeed but the Haytien Embassy!! It is so, I tell you; there they were, guests and honored guests, and unmistakably *colored* at that! — It was a new sensation. There is no mistake about it! I felt queerly, as though I were having a very funny dream. Two elegant colored gentlemen, white kid gloves, Parisian toilet, conversing in Spanish, French and English, yet most unmistakably darkey! Col. Romaine, the Haytien Charge d'Affairs, is tall, very fine looking and bright copper colored. His hair is like that of an Indian, his features Spanish, and his manner very French. His Secretary is a regular colored representative and no mistake. The hair of this gentleman *kinks*! How else can I describe it! Well, it was droll to see

them in society, but they were modest and reserved, acting with perfect dignity, and evidently *gentlemen*. I confess I stared more at them than was quite polite, and found it a little hard to keep my face straight, for any one who has been raised in a slave State finds it a little ludicrous to be entertaining people from Hayti. With the exception of myself I believe the guests were Northern born, and as I am such a good Abolitionist, I soon found that it was not at all difficult to pay proper attention and respect to these Haytien dignitaries. Very soon after supper, they took their departure, and although the guests smiled a little at the strange companionship, they did not evince repugnance to the men whose manners were so gentlemanly. The European diplomatic gentlemen present entered into cordial conversation with them. I saw the stylish waiters roll their eyes solemnly, as the master of the House himself waited upon his dark guests at supper, but they did not even smile, or indicate otherwise their surprise. . . .

I wish my Lady friends could see the tremendous change in the fashion of hair dressing just copied at New York and Washington from Paris styles. A lady wishing to dress her hair fully *a la mode*, goes to the hair dressers and purchases a cataract, a cat, two rats and two mice! These are names of the cushions upon which the hair is rolled. I remember hearing that my great grandmother used to have the cushion upon which her hair was rolled, secured to the head by a long pin thrust through the skin of the scalp, which became quite callous after long usage! My scalp begins to ache in anticipation, as I see the hair towering more and more above the ladies' heads. Woe to those who must depend on a hair dresser, and cannot imitate fashion! At the Hotels this winter the "*Coifuriere*" was obliged to begin at three in the afternoon, in order to accommodate all the ladies who had engaged their services, before ten o'clock. The first time I adopted moderately this style I was quite startled at the tower on my head, but the more of a Babel I get there now, the better contented am I. So despotic is custom, and such simpletons are we! Such looking heads as are carried in Washington would scare any respectable team on the streets of Des Moines! Shades of our grandmothers! Powder is coming also! Powdered hair, long pointed bodices, and next will come, Oh, gentlemen, *short* clothes, for you! Fashion will not spare you, Sirs! Prepare your minds at once. . . .

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, March 18, 1863]

[December 9, 1863]

. . . Washington looks strangely to me. It seems to have lost its former

distinctive features, with the exception of dust and boarding houses. I have asked many persons, especially among the old residents and decayed gentility, what is the cause of the change, and the answer is, invariably, "shoddy!" Now, this term is so comprehensive that it utters a great deal, and certainly there is a newness, a sort of awkwardly-displayed wealth on the streets that bespeaks a grand convulsion in society — a turning up of the social soil, a burial of the "upper crust," and a revelation of the hitherto hidden strata. Now I, for one, am not disposed to quarrel altogether with "shoddy." It has worked well for its money, and on the loyal side of turn-penny. I laugh a little to see "Shoddy's" wife with four or five India shawls, and diamonds by the quart, but confess to coveting a small portion nevertheless. There is a wonderful "turning-up" of noses amongs F. F. V.'s, who have nothing left but the "good old blood" to boast of, at the new people made by the war speculation, but this grand revolution was needed for a healthy, vigorous social growth, and though in new soil many weeds must flourish, by and bye a hearty, active race will fill the places of lazy Secesh gentility. So, good luck to Mr. and Mrs. Shoddy, and all the little Shoddies. The world is wide enough for everybody!

The strong-minded element is also now a feature of Washington. We have Fred Douglas [*sic.* Frederick Douglass, famous Negro orator] lecturing, and women lecturing, and you may see any day on the Avenue, "Dr. Smith," a handsome young lady dressed in black cloth pantaloons and with a tunic or Bloomer dress, and a black Spanish cloth cape, with also a high crowned hat. Dr. Smith practices medicine, *she* does, and carries a satchel containing her pills and powders. I saw her and the picture of the five-legged calf on the Avenue at the same moment, and was so confused with two such uncouth phenomena that I really could not do justice to either.

...
The White House is to be very gay this winter. That the President, having safely recovered from varioloid, the word has gone around that strangers are to be well entertained at the Presidential mansion this year. Our new and genial Speaker, Mr. [Schuyler] Colfax, has taken a large house, and his mother and sister will do the honors thereof. Mrs. Gov. Sprague [Kate Chase, daughter of Salmon P. Chase, had married William Sprague, former governor of Rhode Island, now a Senator], more queenly than ever, will be the leading star in social circles. And as for fashions — how can I describe them? Never were they so capricious! Dresses and

cloaks are trimmed with epaulette trimmings. Everything is *a-la-militaire*. Bonnets are small and very becoming in style, and felt and beaver hats are now worn everywhere, even in New York. The Glengarry hat is the prettiest, quite eclipsing the Spanish high crown, and *wings* are worn on the Glengarry instead of feathers. So that a sick soldier remarked the other day that he knew angels had been near him, for they had *wings*. Curls are all the rage, and hoops are beautifully less. Fashion is just upon the turn, and we shall now have the powdered hair and gored two-breadth dresses. Oh, ye horrors! Russian leather muffs and belts are much worn, and little outside pockets of leather hanging from the belt. Gold and silver butterflies are worn in the hair. In truth, so many novelties have appeared that I stare along at the shop windows like a Chinese, for I am puzzled to know what these traps for green-backs are meant for, so utterly new are they to my eyes. . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Dec. 23, 1863]

[December 19, 1863]

. . . Well, let me see what there is to tell of interest! Oh, the Russian fleet of course. — What a glorious visit we made to the Admiral, and how heartily he welcomed us to his ship. It would puzzle any one to tell of the dishes that were served at the collation, for never were such oddities seen by your correspondent, and never such marvels tasted. — Everything was Russian, and everything was good; but the combinations of form and flavor were magic to me, at any rate. Each guest was presented with a bouquet of exotics, and after the collation, a wonderful brass band discoursed intoxicating, bewildering music, moving the grave Senator or Statesman to the light fantastic, and driving the belles of Washington to desperate rivalry in obtaining the strong arm of support from some fair moustached Russian officer in dance and Schottische. As the Russians speak no English, their invitation to waltz was simply a seizure of their partner, and no objections were offered by any of the lassies, so far as I could judge. The bride of the Admiral, Mme. Lisovski, was on board; she has a very kindly countenance, but is fifteen years older than the Admiral, who is about fifty years of age. . . .

And now I must tell of quite a new fashion, but may good angels forbid our Iowa ladies from adopting it! There has arisen a wonderful mania among the fair sex to lead about the streets little dogs, little wretched curly poodles, or long land-spaniels, or Italian grey-hounds blanketed! and those

poor *doglets* are collared and led by a ribbon, and the owner thereof walks by its side, and one seems to me to have about as much sense as the other! Now there is some comfort and real companionship in a large, noble dog that looks into your eyes with an honest expression of friendliness, as though it longed to utter its hearty good will in words instead of barks! But what possesses ladies to make pets of miserable little poodles is past my comprehension. Now the fashionable lady would shudder at the thought of carrying her own pretty baby down Broadway or Pennsylvania, and I confess it would be rather inconvenient; but why a snappy, snarly, red-eyed little dog is an improvement on this I can't see! A lady went up town the other day with no less than four ribbon-led puppies, and they danced about to the infinite risk of tripping up every wayfarer who came within any respectable distance of the happy owner. . . .

Washington society is much changed this winter. Many wealthy residents have removed for the winter to Northern cities. — "Decayed gentility" remaining here by force of circumstances has retired within its own circles as much as possible. The wives of several Diplomats have gone to their foreign homes, and they will indeed be missed in society. Very, very many families who had made preparations for entertaining on a large scale, have been stricken by the hand of death, and the mourning garb has taken the place of gay attire, and tears sadden the cheek so recently dimpled with smiles. . . . The most stylish equipages in Washington this winter belong to Copperheads. Having given nothing to the war, they have feathered their nests very comfortably. One of my neighbors, who is the head and front of Copperheadism, drives a splendid pair of horses, and rests on his cushioned seats, in the most lordly and supercilious style. But my memory carries me back to the days when he knew not of a carriage, but "walked in his integrity," which cannot be said of him now, actually or figuratively. . . .

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, Dec. 30, 1863]

[December 29, 1863]

. . . Christmas has been very joyous in Washington. Santa Claus was unusually generous, and the Churches are marvels of beautiful decoration. The Christmas Eve, of this year, at "the Epiphany" I can never forget. At half past five, about 300 children of the Sabbath School of that Church assembled and were delighted to behold a Christmas Tree which was indeed a wonder to old and young. The great Cedar reached nearly to the ceiling,

from its high platform, and just over it hung the Christ-child, or Christmas angel, a beautiful figure, dressed as an angel in fleecy, cloud-like gauze, and with hands outspread over the loaded branches. Innumerable wax candles glimmered amidst the tree, and also bright lanterns of colored isinglass. Every child of the Sunday School received a present from the tree, so its size can be imagined. . . .

After New Years the gay season begins. Mrs. Lincoln has held one very brilliant reception, cards having been issued to the desired guests. I have never seen so distinguished an assemblage as met on this occasion. The officers of the Russian fleet, the Diplomatic Corps, the members of the Cabinet and their families, Senators, Judges, Congressmen, and superior Army and Navy officers, all met with cordial greetings and hearty good will. The marine band played finely, and the ladies were resplendent in their new winter "Cabinet" costumes. The loveliest looking lady there was Mrs. Hamlin. "Lovely" is the descriptive word because she seemed so true and cordial, so gentle and winning. Mrs. Fernando Wood [Fernando Wood, Congressman from New York and a leader of the "Peace Democrats"] was attired as might be a Princess. I saw one lady with a velvet mantle reaching to the feet, heavily embroidered with gold. There were more court dresses at this first matinee at the White House than generally appear upon a similar occasion. Etiquette required that all those invited should attend, and therefore the number of guests was very great

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, Jan. 13, 1864]

[January 19, 1864]

. . . Every day and hour is full of event, and it is a hard fight to bring into the twelve hours social, intellectual and domestic duties. Invitations abound for every kind of entertainment — lectures without end, concerts, sculptures, callings and drives. — Nothing but a determined will, and a strong preference for home can secure to the Martyr of Life at the Capital any hours for privacy and domestic enjoyment. Yet Washington is a pleasant place, and nowhere in society do we find more good-will and genial kindness. Do you know we have had skating here this winter, fine skating for several days? I went down to the Long Bridge with a party of young people, and amused myself watching their performance until it thoroughly aggravated me to think that skating had not been a ladies' fashion in my own day. . . . The skating dress is very pretty for ladies — crimson, gray

or blue cloth trowsers [sic], balmoral skirt reaching to the top of the boot, a full dress skirt over, worn with fur trimmings around the hem, a bright fur trimmed basque with pockets trimmed with fur, fur gloves, Glengarry caps, and boots trimmed with fur around the ankles. Beautiful steel skates are strapped quickly upon the feet, and off go the skaters as free and happy as birds at sea.

Professor Agassiz has been giving a course of lectures upon Glaciers. They were very fascinating, the first two thrillingly interesting. The last one was so speculative that it required more faith than I possess to swallow it! It may be that our continent was once the abode of Glaciers. It may be that these were produced by a terrible snow-storm lasting for years, perhaps. It may be that this storm was the result of the dense quantities of vapor accumulating in the atmosphere, from volcanic masses of heated rock cast into the ocean and causing wondrous clouds to arise, but nobody knows whether this be so or not, and for my part, not being scientific, I had to have a hearty laugh over the Professor's unprecedented snow storm, falling as he so devoutly believed, before man was created! He maintains that all the hills and valleys of Iowa and the West were formed by Glaciers extending from the Northern regions, gradually moving Southward into the Southern States. These carried the fragments of rock and other solid materials within and upon them, which they deposited as the glacier melted under the influence of the heat which gradually increased from the tropics Northward. He would account in this way for the boulders which are found and known as "lost rocks" in Iowa.

But the most interesting and exciting lecture of the season was given by Miss Annie Dickinson last week, in the Hall of the House of Representatives. The galleries and floor were crowded to their utmost capacity. Every one was there, expectant, smiling, ready to mock or sneer, or eager to applaud. I have never marked so many varied expressions of countenance as I saw amongst that immense throng. The President and Mrs. Lincoln sat in front of the platform, and around them the most distinguished persons present. Old Abe had a half solemn, half grinning expression now and then, as though the scene "reminded him of a story." But he held his honest old head down, and it was hard guessing what he did think. At eight o'clock Vice President Hamlin conducted Miss Dickinson to her seat on the platform, and in a neat little speech introduced her to her audience. I saw the color entirely fade from the young lady's face as she confronted

the sea of faces before, around and above her, but she betrayed no other signs of emotion. In a pure, full voice, she entered gradually upon her subject, becoming at last so wholly absorbed in her great thoughts of patriotism and progress, that one might well forget the youthful girl in admiration of her eloquence, and recognize only the orator, the voice of all true loyal heartedness expressed through those brave tones.

Miss Dickinson is, to my eyes, very handsome — about twenty years of age, with a steel gray eye, full red lips and fine teeth. — Her hair is dark and cut tolerably short, just below the ears. She dresses with simple elegance, and is very ladylike in manner, although somewhat angular in her movements. Raised a Quaker, she will never dispense with a certain reserve or frigidity of manner which carries with it a conviction of sincerity and single-mindedness. Being entirely radical, Miss Dickinson did not mince matters, but gave her opinion of the President unsparingly, ending however with the hope that all would be made right in his next term of office. She very handsomely complimented Mr. Lincoln after having relieved her mind, and the balm offered more than compensated for the wound. The lecture was long, but interest never flagged. Her descriptions of battles and hospitals were awfully harrowing. She can never have suffered personal losses in this war or she could not have portrayed, so vividly, scenes that were almost too terrible to describe. I am glad to have heard her, but after the glamour of the hour had passed I thought of her with mingled pride and pain. I do not care to hear a young girl speak before the public again. It may be womanly, but it is not maidenly. Far be it from me to criticise real merit, but I am old-fashioned in my notions, so far as woman-life is concerned. No woman can live for crowds of beaux and admirers and preserve that peculiar charm of her sex — home charm! But all honor to Miss Dickinson! She is good and true, young and beautiful, and may Heaven guard her! . . .

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Feb. 3, 1864]

[January 10, 1865]

. . . The city has been honored by a visit from Vice Admiral Farragut, and eager eyes have crowded to behold the grand old hero. I was invited to a dinner party given to him at Willard's and as he honored me with a seat at his right hand, I made the most of my opportunity and asked all the questions I chose concerning matters great and small, relating to the Ad-

miral's experience. — With regard to dress; the rank of Vice Admiral is designated by three very broad gold bands around the coat sleeve near the hand, and three stars on the shoulder. We have now in our navy, Rear Admirals, and one Vice Admiral. Should Vice Admiral Farragut win another great victory he will be Admiral in full, which is the highest rank. He is a genial, social man, full of anecdote and rallying good nature. His wife is youthful in appearance but very simple in dress. Her toilette was in marked contrast with that of a New York lady who graced the occasion, and whose diamond necklace, cross, ear-rings, rings, buttons, bracelets and breastpin dazzled our eyes with an excess of brilliancy rarely to be seen upon one unfortunate individual. I say unfortunate, for diamonds, like perfumes, have need to be used in limited quantities, for the effect is too strong to be agreeable.

I have been amazed to find how deserted the stores in Washington appear. A few days since I went into three of the principal dry goods stores and literally found myself the only purchaser each time. This state of things is owing to the fact that strangers here have done the most of their shopping at home, and the salaried people of Washington are so cramped in meeting their expenses that unnecessary purchases are not even thought of. Butter is 75 cents per pound, milk 20 cents per quart, and as for table luxuries their price is fabulous. Very few persons hire carriages now. Last year's cloaks and dresses are worn without hesitation by stylish ladies. . . .

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, Jan. 18, 1865]

[January 16, 1865]

Last Wednesday I made the Cabinet calls, and as this sort of pastime is becoming an unmitigated bore to your correspondent, probably I shall not make the same round of formal etiquette visits this session, and will therefore head my chapter on fashions with a chat about our agreeable ladies of the Cabinet. Mrs. Seward, always first, always loveliest and most gracious, hospitable and courteous in manners, she is never familiar, never forgetful of her dignity. Her parlors are always crowded, and that too by the most refined and elegant ladies and gentlemen. Her dress on reception day was a heavy wine colored silk, trimmed with black ribbon, a very rich point lace, coiffure simply arranged, and jewelry elegant and appropriate. At Mrs. S's an usher announces the names of ladies as they enter the drawing room, and therefore Mrs. Seward is never betrayed into the awkwardness

of forgetting an old acquaintance even amongst her host of callers. She always rises and advances with extended hand and pleased expression, but never devotes more than a minute or two to each caller. Mrs. Stanton is the most stately lady in the Cabinet. She is very handsome but much complaint is made of her freezing manner and repellant address. Her reception toilette was asurline blue and velvet. The family of [the] new Postmaster General [William Dennison] is very charming. Mrs. Dennison is handsome and gracious, her young daughter the picture of health and freshness, and in manner very winning. Miss Neal and Miss Swayne, of Columbus, are with Mrs. Dennison this winter, and aid in making her house an unusually attractive one.

Mr. Fessenden's [Secretary of the Treasury W. P. Fessenden] young daughter-in-law does the honors of his house this winter. She is pretty and affable. Mrs. Welles did not receive on account of illness, and the family of Mr. Speed [Attorney General James Speed] have not yet arrived. Mrs. Usher [Secretary of the Interior John P. Usher] is always cordial and chatty, and seems to be very popular. Mrs. Matthews, the mother of Speaker Colfax, receives also on Wednesdays. She and her young daughter signed the Loyal Woman's Pledge and buy no imported articles. Their toilette is consequently conscientiously simple, but they are much beloved for their hearty and friendly hospitality.

The style of dress this season is very dashing. The bonnets are mere head dresses of lace and flowers, without caps, often without crowns. Black velvet with pink roses for street bonnets are most in fashion, and calling bonnets are of every imaginable style. I can only say for my own head gear, that I feel as though I were wearing one of my grandmother's funny dress caps. The hair is worn very much *creped* (without rats!) in front of these bonnets, and in a low waterfall at the back of the head. A cushion technically or rather *barbarously* termed a "cucumber," is worn at parties over the forehead, the hair frizzled (to speak English) and turned back over it. Gold nets are much worn, and immense ball hair pins, white or red ivory. Deep fluted muslin ruffles are worn as collars, and with small linen collars little white muslin cravats. The ends worn at the back of a dress waist are often a yard and a quarter long, and a quarter of a yard wide. Coats are almost wholly in *basque*, long or short, trimmed coat fashion or *en militaire*. Curls are going out, and loose large waterfalls worn instead. Bonnets are often sold now with the waterfall pinned on all ready.

. . . On short basquines for young girls, a knot of black ribbon is worn on the left shoulder, with ends a yard long. Hats are of every shape. Dresses are always looped for the street over fancy balmoral skirts — high balmoral boots worn also. The most fashionable gloves are laced on the back of the hand about an inch deep with elastic cord. Mrs. Lincoln held her first matinee day before yesterday. She desires all ladies to appear in full dress, and her wishes having become known on this point, a stranger may behold on these occasions the most perfect taste and considerable rivalry in fashionable toilettes.

Of course, my Iowa friends know that Washington has the reputation of being a remarkably wicked city. I have been loth to become a convert to this opinion, but the experience of the last four years has rather forced such a conviction upon me. I have queried and studied a good deal as to the whys and wherefores of this wickedness, and certainly it is difficult to determine why Washington should be a more dangerous city, morally speaking, than almost any other. Yet I have seen good men and good women come to this city, and under the spell, subtle and undefined, of the Capital, lose at first their intuition to detect wrong, and next their power to resist it. Extravagance in dress, in living in pursuit of pleasure, seem to steal unaware upon the unwary victim. Those once temperate, alas, betray by bloated cheek and restless eye, the sad truth of too freely taken stimulants. Some, especially among women, are tempted by ambition for social position to sacrifice home, family, a necessary economy, everything in fact, that they may be seen at every ball and party a prominent and favored guest. And, Oh! I have seen such pass from the flush and glory of their bloom to the sick room or the grave, victims of their follies and unworthy emulation. Only yesterday I paused in the street, shocked to behold a lady friend, once the center of an admiring circle, now trembling with premature palsy and the departed roses of her youth supplied by glaring rouge. I hear of opium eating, of arsenic eating, or whisky drinking (the latter under the polite name of Bourbon) until my heart sickens and grows faint with the moral atmosphere about this terrible Washington. Hotel reading rooms and bar rooms, toadyism, vanity, an ever pervading carnival of strange and exciting scenes and diversions — these break up habits of regular living, and dissipate the hours in idleness and gaiety. Every one is in good humor here, few stop to moralize, there is so much to enjoy, "what is the use of prosing?" . . .

[Des Moines Iowa State Register, Jan. 25, 1865]

[March 6, 1865]

It has been a question with me the last half hour how I am to collect my scattered wits sufficiently to write my last letter to the *Register*. Fatigue does not begin to express the deplorable weariness of body and brain, yet the Inauguration must be described, and I will proceed to tell all I know of it without further preface or apology. On Friday, the 3rd of March, Washington was thronged in every nook and cranny with strangers, distinguished and otherwise. The by-streets and cars were crowded as well as the avenues and public buildings. — The Capitol seemed to be the principal attraction and place of rendezvous, and it became rather a difficult matter to walk through the building or find a place in the galleries. Visitors at the hotels complained of semi-starvation and entire neglect, and private families stood but a poor chance of procuring food from market or stores. The last evening of Congress was an awful jam. The members were obliged to admit ladies to the floor of the House, for the galleries would not hold them. Many ladies remained until a late hour at the Senate and House, and returned to their homes in the midst of rain and mud — enough to daunt the most persistent. Early Saturday morning, although the rain still continued, carriages and cars full of ladies wended their way to the Capitol. I went myself at nine, found many before the East door already. There we were coolly informed by a horrible door-keeper that we were not to be admitted before eleven! The crowd increased until its size became nothing less than appalling. Then began that fearful pressure for a place nearer the doors, the crowd bearing up the steps and swaying to and fro, on and on, until one could hardly breathe, and could not move another inch! And there we stood, waiting and watching. Good natured people joked and laughed; cross ones looked daggers of hatred and indignation, and used elbows and heels to assist their rights. Highly aristocratic Dowagers, gorgeous in velvet and ermine, escorted by Senators of high degree stood disgusted at the law of the Medes and Persians which reiterated "door opens at eleven." Haughty heads were tossed, dainty noses elevated, splendid dresses spoiled, and still we waited like Peris at the gate of Paradise, no "open sesame for us!" The clouds gathered darkly, and drizzled drearily down. Alas for bonnet; alas for velvet; hard-hearted door keepers were unmoved by the scenes of direst woe! At length, at length! The doors are thrown wide open, and the crowd bursts in! How we got into the Senate galleries I cannot say. I am inclined to think we flew, for I do not remember touching ground until I

found myself in a splendid front seat, wondering at my good luck, and endeavoring to collect my distracted ideas. The galleries were filled in about fifteen minutes, not a place to be had for love or brass, or what the negroes call "elbow grease" which signifies "*strength of arms.*" The Senate was still in session, all the Senators sitting to the left of the Speaker. The commotion in the galleries soon drew the rebuke of Mr. Hamlin, but in vain! — Then a grave Senator got up and made a solemn appeal to the ladies to cease their noise, and threatened to have the galleries cleared, at which a jolly titter pervaded the joyous assembly! I happened to observe that the said Senator's wife was chattering most unflaggingly, but he didn't see it! For a few minutes the galleries were quiet, then the murmur and buzz rose again, and the solemn old Senators frowned heavily. Mr. Sumner gravely and rigidly shook his finger at the galleries as if ladies cared for an old Bachelor's wrath! No one said much, only a little, each leaf in a forest makes but slight rustling, but the aggregate is a volume of sound, just so the "little members" upstairs outweighed the big Senators below, and all I have to say is that if any man was insane enough to suppose that 3,000 women could be kept quiet on Inauguration day, they deserved what they got, defeat! But when Andy Johnson appeared to take the oath of office, then all was still. Mr. Hamlin's farewell was dignified and appropriate, and he administered the oath to Mr. Johnson in a solemn and impressive manner. The diplomatic corps in their gorgeous and superb court dresses were seated at the right of the Speakers. The Judges of the Supreme Bench in their black gowns were present, and the members of the Cabinet also. Mrs. Lincoln sat in the diplomatic gallery, escorted by Senator Harlan of Iowa. The President sat in front of the Speaker's desk, facing the assembly. He looked very pale and very noble, his expression was grand! Marshal [Ward Hill] Lamon, and other Marshals, and a crowd of distinguished Generals and Statesmen occupied the floor, and the scene as beheld from the galleries was brilliant beyond description. Just as the procession formed to escort Mr. Lincoln to the great East portion of the building, where in the face of the expectant crowd he was to take the oath of office, the sun burst forth from the clouds in all His splendor, and bathed the city in a clear, strong light. This glad omen thrilled all hearts. There, in the presence of a crowd of enthusiastic friends, stood again Abraham Lincoln! — Who shall dare to say that this man was not specially raised of Providence to bless and save our Nation? Pale, quiet, he spoke his few clear sentences, with a

modesty and self-forgetfulness unparalleled. And above his head shone the sweet light of the evening star — bringing its loveliness into the day, that all hearts might hope for love and peace, that love, not war, should herald the coming years, and heal our Nation's bleeding heart.

Again the procession formed, and moved along the Avenue, black troops and white! — Yes, Africa! Four years ago, down-trodden, now uprisen, Free.

MIRIAM

[Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, March 15, 1865]