

III

1806–1860

Virginia, Henry A. Wise and His Family

IN the young and growing new nation, these were years of increasing regional animosity engendered by one issue—slavery. Each admission of a new state, slave or free, was cause for hostile feelings that were only resolved through a compromise that would have to be re-visited when another territory wished to become a state. In 1849 it took sixty-three ballots to elect a Speaker of the House of Representatives, and at different times there were a variety of gag rules against abolitionist petitions to Congress. Abolitionists were very active: The American Anti-Slavery Society was formed in 1833; by 1836 there were over 500 abolitionist societies active in the north; the “Underground Railway” was established in 1838 to assist slaves fleeing to Canada, and northern states enacted Personal Liberty Laws to obstruct the Federal Fugitive Slave Act. Feelings in the south were equally strong: In 1835 a mob in Charleston, South Carolina, burned abolitionist literature impounded by the local postmaster; some of the southern states enacted laws prohibiting the distribution of abolitionist literature, and in 1859 a convention in Vicksburg urged the repeal of all laws prohibiting the importation of slaves. In 1851 Charles Sumner, an outspoken abolitionist, was elected Senator from Massachusetts. Five years later he was beaten unconscious by Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina in response to Sumner’s criticism of Brooks’ uncle. It took Sumner, now a martyr in the North, three years to recover from the attack while at the same time Brooks was being praised in the South.

However, there were also other things happening in America and around the world during these years. The Troy Female Seminary was opened in 1821 by Emma Willard in Troy, New York. In 1825 the Erie Canal was opened which greatly reduced the cost of transporting goods and materials between New York and the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys. Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1830. The following year Nat Turner led an unsuccessful slave revolt in Virginia and William Lloyd Garrison founded *The Liberator*, an abolitionist periodical urging the release of all slaves. In 1834 slavery was abolished in the British Empire and Cyrus McCormick patented his reaper, forever changing wheat farming in America and around the world. Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* was published in 1837. In 1839 Charles Darwin published the first summary of his 1832–1836 voyage on the *HMS Beagle*, and in 1857 he published the outline of his theory of evolution and natural selection. In 1839 Abner Doubleday laid out the first baseball diamond in Cooperstown, New York. It would be another twenty years before the first collegiate baseball game was played in Williamstown, Massachusetts, between Amherst College and Williams College. James Fenimore-Cooper published *The Deerslayer* in 1841. In 1844 Joseph Smith was killed by a mob in Nauvoo, Illinois, and Brigham Young

became head of the Mormon Church. In 1857 a mass murder at Mountain Meadows, Utah, resulted in the deaths of 140 non-Mormons. In that same year some Mormons rebelled against the appointment of a non-Mormon as the territorial governor and in 1858 U. S. Troops were used to restore order. However, as a rule, little attention was being paid to Mormonism by anyone in Virginia during these years. America again greatly expanded its territory after the Mexican-American war of 1846–1847. The fight against slavery became a part of American literature when in 1851 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was serialized in *National Era*, an anti-slavery periodical based in Washington, D. C.

Letters and writings by:

William H. Brown, *Portrait Gallery—Distinguished American Citizens with Biographical Sketches and Fac-Similes of Original Letters*

William E. Cameron, a former Governor of Virginia

John Cropper

James P. Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*

William Prime, excerpts from his book, *Boat Life on the Nile*

Barton Haxall Wise, a grandson of Henry A. Wise, excerpts from his biography of his grandfather

Henry A. Wise

The children of Henry A. Wise:

Mary Elizabeth Wise, the oldest daughter by his first wife, married to Dr. Alexander Y. P. Garnett.

Obadiah Jennings Wise, the oldest son by his first wife.

Annie Jennings Wise, a daughter by his first wife, married to Frederick Plumer Hobson.

John Sergeant Wise, a son by his second wife, excerpts from *The End of An Era*.

Ann Elizabeth Wise, Henry A. Wise's first wife and a daughter of Obadiah Jennings

Mary Lyons Wise, Henry A. Wise's third wife.

Letters written from: Twifordville, Accomack, Onancock, Williamsburg, Richmond, Lynchburg, and Eastwood, Goochland County, Virginia; Bloomington, Indiana; Washington, D. C.; and Berlin, Germany.

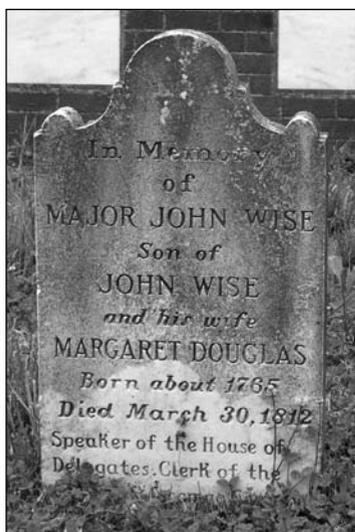


While no letters or other documents survive about Henry A. Wise's early years, there are some important facts that should be summarized:

- 1806, Henry A. Wise born December 3rd in Accomack, Virginia.
- 1812, Wise's father, John Wise 5th, died. The below letter from John Cropper to his daughters tells of this death:

Drummond town, Virginia, 2d April 1812

My dear children, Ann and Eliza— I have to communicate the melancholy news of the death of Major John Wise. He departed this life the 28th ultimo at eleven o'clock in the forenoon. Major Wise had been declining ever since last summer, but his situation was flattering, and his friends hoped he would recover until about the middle of last month, when he declined more rapid, and death put a period to his affliction at the time I have mentioned, leav-



Grave of Major John Wise, born about 1765, died March 30, 1812, Wise family burial ground near Chesconessex Creek, Onancock, Virginia.

ing behind him a widow and six children, all of them to bear the severe loss of an affectionate husband, tender parent, and valuable protector. Let us not moan, but remember to imitate his talents and copy his virtues. I intend to go to Philadelphia the last of this month prepared to bring you both home, Ann to remain at home, but Eliza to return to school in the fall. I received a letter from each of you, by the last mail, written on the same sheet of paper, which was very satisfactory. Eliza improves now, and Ann loses in handwriting, owing to hurry and heedlessness. Your affectionate Father *Jno. Cropper, Jr.* (Virginia Historical Society, typed copy of letter.)

☞ Henry Alexander Wise—A self description of his boyhood:

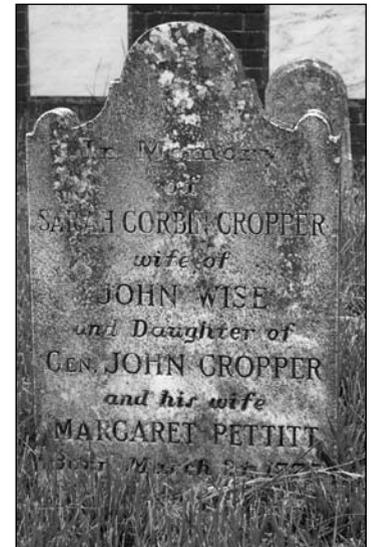
“He was a pale and puny boy in body, of large eyes and mouth and ugly, and so odd and oldish he wouldn’t make with the children, but sought the old folks and learned their saying, and was fond of sweethearts older than himself, and spent his pocket money for red ribbons and climbed after nuts and fruit for their favors. He delighted in old stories, loved curious things; caught up quaint sayings, made something or much of what others threw away as nothing; was called by hard nicknames, but especially by the name of Prince Hal, because of a high-strung nervous temperament; and, fondled by black nurses, he was willful in his humors and sharp and quick and imperious in his temper; he loved fun and was fond of sport, precocious in mischief, tough and wiry in his tissues, an active, daring bad boy who could learn whatever he tried, but wouldn’t learn what he didn’t love, and could fight hard or run fast. There was a strange admixture of hardy recklessness and extreme caution in his nature; he was a great mimic and game maker, often offended by his broad humor, but was frank and genial, and so warm in his affections, and generous in his disposition, that he was generally popular, though he could when he tried make some hate him with a bitter hate.”

—Barton Haxall Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia*.

- 1813, Wise’s mother, Sarah Corbin Cropper Wise, died. Wise then went to live at Bowman’s Folly near the Atlantic Ocean, the home of his maternal grandfather, General John Cropper.
- 1814–1815, Wise went to live with two aunts near Chesconnessex Creek on the Chesapeake Bay side of Accomac.
- At age eight, Wise attends Margaret Academy near Accomac.
- 1822, before he was sixteen, Wise goes to Washington College, (now Washington and Jefferson College in Washington, Pennsylvania), where Dr. Andrew Wylie was the President.
- 1823, Wise meets Anne Elizabeth Jennings, the daughter of the Reverend Obadiah Jennings, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Washington, Pennsylvania.
- 1825, Wise graduates and commences the study of law with Judge Henry St. George Tucker.
- 1827, Wise emancipates Elizabeth Grey and her two children, Mary Jane and William Henry. In later years William Henry Grey, a young mulatto boy, accompanied Wise into the House of Representatives.
- August 1828, Wise leaves Virginia for Nashville, Tennessee where Anne Elizabeth Jennings was then living with her parents. Anne’s father, Obadiah Jennings, was a close friend of Andrew Jackson and the wedding party visited Jackson’s home, The Hermitage, after the wedding.



Henry Alexander Wise, photo by Rockwood, Holland Building, 1440 Broadway (40th Street), New York.

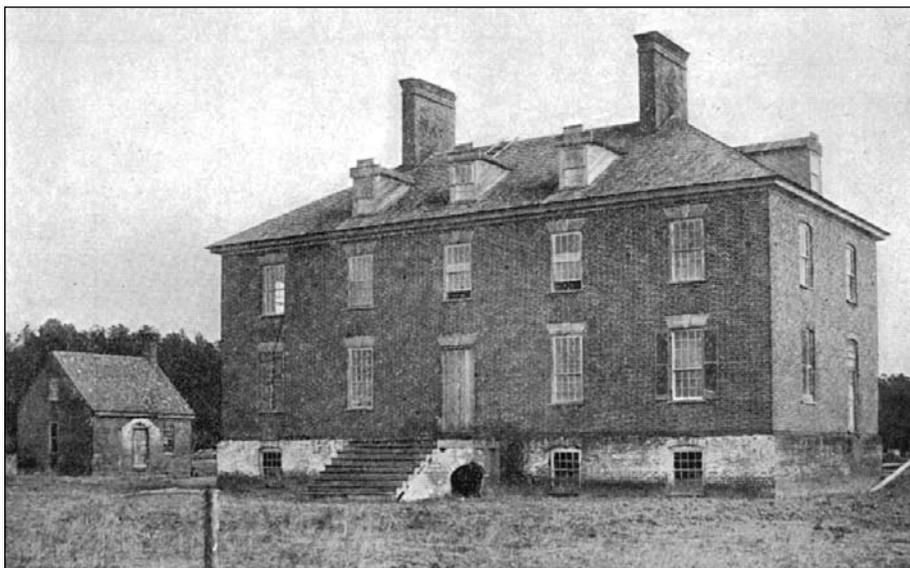


Grave of Sara Corbin Cropper Wise, 1777–1813, wife of John Wise 5th, 1765–1812, Wise family burial ground near Chesconnessex Creek, Onancock, Virginia.

On May 3, 1811, John Cropper wrote the following letter in search of a new teacher:

Dear Sir— . . . I indulge myself in the pleasure of writing to you, and enquiring after the health and welfare of yourself, Mrs. Jones, and your children—and also to ask of you your opinion, whether a teacher could be employed in New York for the Margaret academy in Accomack. A single man well recommended for capacity and moral character is required, and if such a one could be employed he might expect a liberal salary. The trustees have about the last of March Mr. David Comfort the principal left the academy on account of a spell of sickness which he had and an apprehension that he might have his health in the future. . . . Please answer this letter by Mr. Snead, or by mail to Drummond Town, Virginia. Your respectful servant, Jno. Cropper Jr.”

(Letter, John Cropper to Reverend Cave Jones, Virginia Historical Society.)



*Margaret Academy, Cheriton vicinity, Accomack County, Virginia. The Virginia General Assembly granted a charter to establish this school in 1786, but it was not built until 1806, opening in 1807. John Cropper was one of the founders and benefactors of the school, and it was named after his first wife, Margaret Pettit Cropper. The school was described as “a high-grade classical school, at which many of the leading men of the Eastern Shore have been educated.” The school building was destroyed in the late 19th century. Photograph from *Virginia Homes and Churches* by Robert Lancaster, Jr.*

☞ The first marriage—Wise’s love for Anne Jennings, their marriage, and the return to Virginia have been described as follows:

He became enamored of this lady whilst at college, and never rested until the marriage rites were celebrated, on the 8th day of October 1828, in the city of Nashville, Tennessee, where her father had been called as pastor of the Presbyterian congregation of that place. Mr. Wise had made his arrangements previously to leaving Virginia to settle in Nashville, which he did. . . . But still he sighed for the ‘milk of the ocean,’ his ‘own’ native Virginia. To gratify his wife, he made every effort to be satisfied in Nashville. But despite all that he could do, he was unhappy outside his native State. . . . Finally to gratify this wish of his heart, he determined, with the consent of his wife, to return to Accomack: which he did in the fall of 1830. When he returned home, the scenes of his boyhood exhilarated and enlivened a feeble frame which had almost fallen a prey to melancholy.” —James P. Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*.

Henry A. Wise was elected to Congress in April 1833.

“A reporter, in an article entitled *Glances at Congress*, thus describes his [Henry A. Wise’s] personal appearance and manner of speaking: “He is pale and thin, about thirty years of age, perhaps not so much. He dresses like an old man, though his general appearance is very youthful. He is very slovenly in his apparel, his coat hanging like a miller’s bag on his shoulders. . . . His forehead is projecting and massive, and his mouth large, but firmly set. Without being handsome, his face has a general pleasing character. . . . To see him sauntering about the hall, with his long Indian strides, you would at

once be tempted to ask who he was; to hear him speak your attention would be riveted upon him. You no longer see the loose garment on the ungainly figure, the *outré* neckerchief vanishes, and your eyes are fixed on the excited and earnest orator. All his prominent characteristics are brought out with great rapidity—firmness, impetuosity, a disdain for honeyed words, fierce sarcasm and invective, all gather into a hurricane and startle the drowsy members from the lounges and wake up those victims of dull hours, the reporters... Mr. Wise may not always say anything remarkable or striking, but there is an intensity about his manner that fastens on the attention and clutches it until he has finished. He is remarkably quick in arriving at conclusions, and generally, too, in a way that would not have been struck upon by any one else. He is very independent in his disposition, fearless, and, to use a common expression, above board... He has undoubtedly very high talents, and I have heard him, upon more than one occasion, soar into the regions of commanding eloquence. His forte lies in invective; then he becomes, to those whose party sympathies follow his own excited train of feeling, thrilling; his pale and excited face, his firm and compact head thrown back, his small bony hand clenched in the air, or with the forefinger quivering there, his eyes brilliant and fixed, his voice high yet sonorous, impress a picture too vivid to be easily erased from the mind. A stranger, a few days ago, of his own party, on coming into the hall for the first time, at such a moment, compared his appearance to that of a corpse galvanized! Mr. Wise, as is well known, is a prominent member of the opposition. He cannot be ranked as a leader; certain it is, however, he is not led. He is much beloved by those who know him in private life, being jovial, free-hearted, and full of hilarity.”

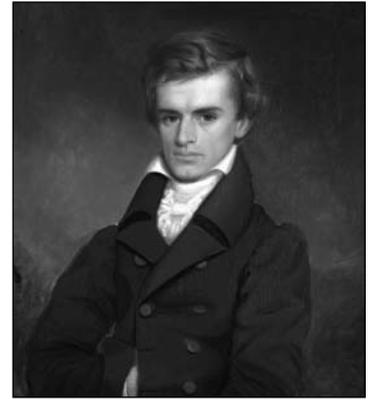
—Barton Haxall Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia*.

1834–1837

☞ Letters to Henry A. Wise in Congress:

December 14, [1834], Twifordville.

My dear Husband— I received your welcome letter informing me of your safe arrival... Friday morning before day, George with the assistance of Mr. Gillet’s men killed the hogs; and after dinner I attended to the weighing of them. The largest weighed 289 pounds, the other 255. Old Lydia seemed much pleased, with the result of their weight, said she had earned her dress, as you had promised it to her, if she made them weigh 5 hundred... In the evening as I promised to go, though it was really inconvenient for me to do so, I took all the children and went to Margaret’s to meet Mrs. Custis. We got there a little before dark. Mrs. Custis did not arrive, until an hour afterwards. We sat up until twelve talking. I learnt all the news of Washington from Mr. McMaster’s. You will hear it all from Mr. McHennan I expect, therefore I will not repeat it, lest it will be Thomson’s news... Saturday morning I left, though it was raining, as the hogs demanded my attention at home. I left Mary and Oby however; they were both very glad that the rain came, and prolonged their visit to Deep Creek... I had my fat fried up and my sausages made Saturday. I got a half a bushel of leaf lard from the hogs. In the afternoon, I sent George to Onancock, as I heard Captain Hopkins had come. He brought me a barrel of fine pippin apples, and a box of Candles... Saturday night Mr. Gillet’s men came and salted my meat away for me. I told Tully to purchase a thousand weight more for us. He sent to Baltimore for his own and our winter stores... Yesterday as the morning was



Governor Henry Alexander Wise, about 1828–1830, artist uncertain. One source attributes this portrait to John Gadsby Chapman, one of Wise’s close personal friends and a frequent visitor to the Wise home in Accomac, Virginia. Collection of the Executive Mansion, courtesy of The Library of Virginia.



Ann Elizabeth Jennings Wise, 1808–1837, wife of Henry A. Wise. Photograph courtesy of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.



“Henry A. Wise, Representative from Virginia,” early political poster. Courtesy of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

unfavourable I did not go to meeting. Charlotte took the gig and went to Deep Creek for the children. I spent the morning reading... I need not tell you that I very much desire to see you and that it will be a fortnight tomorrow since you left us. Farewel [*sic*] my dear husband may every blessing attend. Your wife, *Ann E. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

January 8, 1835.

My dear Husband— Two letters from you, have been duly received (and I think I may add duly appreciated) by me since I last wrote you; and they certainly deserve, a long letter in return. But our life here is so secluded, so barren of incident, that I fear I will not be able to fill a sheet to you today. We have not seen any one, since I last wrote, except Tully, who yesterday peeped at us, for a few minutes. He came to bring some beef, and was obliged to ride on horseback, as the roads are impassable in a gig... The children are all well, and often talk of you & ask me to read them, what you write. Mary says I must tell you, “she can count a hundred, and can *most* read, in the Bible, and those books you sent, with the pretty pictures in them. That she has commenced learning the multiplication table, and wants to know it all, to say to you when you come home.” I must add, that she finds multiplication a vexation, as the old rhyme says, and wished the other day “that the people would not make books with it in them.” ...Oby says “tell papa; I am a good boy, and that I put on my trousers myself this morning.” ...Do not my dear husband, think of me, as being constantly unhappy, & discontented, in your absence. I have a *great deal* this winter, to beguile time of its weariness, and alleviate the pain of separation from you, in the presence & society of my *dear Mother* & sisters. We are all well, and I think as happy, as we can or should be, separated from some of those, we love as well, if not “best of any.” ...I will not apologize *to you* for manner or matter, as you well know, I am not gifted, in epistolary writing, and I well know that for me write what I will, it will be acceptable to you because I wrote it... Believe me to be your affectionate devoted wife. —*Ann E. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

January 16, 1835.

My dear Henry— You have spoilt me writing two letters a week; how much was I disappointed, on Sunday last, when the servant returned with only a bundle of papers... I do not like to hear of that heart burn you mention. I have heard my *dear father* say, that that it was the lowest grade of the dyspepsia. So do have a care of it, if it continues to trouble you, be careful of your diet until rid of it... We all continue as well as usual. My own health still gradually improving. I will attend to your directions about taking exercise &c. Margaret & Tully spent yesterday with us. They had considerable difficulty in getting here, the roads are so dreadful... I need scarcely tell you, that I did not get my pen mended to write you, as I intended. It is almost worn out in the service. I will try and have a new one when I write next... Good night my dear husband and believe me as ever your affectionate wife. —*A. E. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

January 24, 1835.

My dear Husband— It is a bright beautiful morning here, almost as mild as spring. Much would I like, to transport myself to Washington, and climb

Capitol hill with you today. But if I had Aladdin's lamp with the permission of only rubbing it once and wishing, I would prefer bringing you here to see the children and all, unless perchance I knew you were to occupy the floor of the house to-day... Today I have done various little things about the house, have been often enough to the kitchen to afford me some exercise; and have written you this dull account of how I have spent my time since I wrote you. It was not quite twelve when I commenced writing but is now almost seven o'clock, as I have met with many little interruptions, and you know I do not hold the pen, of a very ready writer... I want you my dear Husband to think of me, not "as striving to be contented and happy" but as being most generally quite as much so as you would wish, during your absence. I keep myself fully occupied, and do not sit down to brood over trouble, as you fear. Do not again refer to any trouble you give me when you are here, for it is but trifling, and would not be half what it is, if it were not for my morbid feelings and want of attention to trifles. I do know that you love me as your life, that you love me with an affection equal to mine for you, and more I could not wish for. I have perfect confidence in your unalienable affection. I have put by most carefully your two pumpin [*sic*] seeds, and will have them narrowly watched and particularly taken care of, when the time comes for planting them. Before I opened your letter I felt them and thought it was money, and when I opened it they were done up so much like medicine that I might have supposed it to be a love powder, if I have had the least idea, that you thought I needed one from you. The children are all well... Your affectionate wife, —*Ann E. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

February 2, 1835.

My dear Husband— ...Mother has been quite sick with the influenza since I wrote you but is now getting better. The children are all well and all fast asleep. You need not fear that Oby wants for exercise. He has grown wonderfully since you left home & has become a most incessant talker and master of mischief. I do not think I ever knew as mischievous a child; it really distresses me to see him delight in it so much... —*Ann E. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

February 13, 1835.

My dear Husband— I wrote you a hasty line last mail and did not intend to write again until next Monday, but you express so much anxiety at not having received a letter from me, that I write this mail lest my two last may not reach you... I am writing in the midst of the noise of the children. Mother is engaged writing; they are all dismissed into my room and I have had several times to lay down my pen to try to command quiet and tap Oby for his mischief, pulling the girls hair &c. We are all as well as usual... You must have been indeed surprised by Uncle James Wilson's visit. I do not think that I ever gave you an account of him. If I have not I will do so on your return. Mother and all his relatives thought him dead for a number of years until about a year since. I would write more though I do not know that I have any thing to write that would interest you but it is just dark and I want to send my letter before your good Uncle retires for the night... The children say "tell papa he must come home we want to see him *so bad*." ...Ever yours, *Ann E. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

December 26, 1835.

A pleasant, (if not a merry) Christmas to you, my dear husband. I suppose that you and the other public servants have now a few days respite from attending the house. Would you could employ them in paying us a visit. But this I know cannot be; as the broad Chesapeake rolls between us, and no steamboat waits to convey you here despite wind or weather... You want to know how Henry comes on; he is very fat and becomes more lively and interesting every day. The other children are well, except slight colds... My own health is very delicate. I try to take all the care I can of it. I think I am much thinner than when [you] left home. I feel better this evening however than I have done for several days past... Your books & papers are all safely moved here. I believe I have nothing more to write at present; unless it be to tell you what you very well know, that I am very anxious to see you, and often feel impatient at your long absence, and often or still anticipate your glad return. Let me know when you write next how many sermons you have heard. Who is Mr. Smith that I see is elected Chaplain to the lower house? Is he not a Presbyterian minister and does he preach well? Good night my dear husband, and believe me to be ever your affectionate wife. —*Ann E. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

December 28, 1835.

My dear Husband— Yesterday I received your *very short* letter of the 22d inst. Though I am much obliged to you for it, short as it is, for it assures me of your good health and constant remembrance of me; yet I could not but feel disappointed at its brevity... We have all been blessed with health since I wrote you this day week ago... John called this morning and gave me your letter to read, and the thirty dollars you sent. You say in it you have had constant colds. Whereas you have reported yourself constantly well, except for one day and night to me. Do not my dear Henry ever attempt to deceive me respecting your health, or I shall feel constantly uneasy... The children send love to you: Do take care of your health and do not go to bed with cold feet I beg of you... Farewel my dear Husband and believe me to be as ever your affectionate wife. —*Ann E. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)



Grave of Ann Jennings Wise, 1808–1837, near Chesconessex Creek, Accomack, Virginia, before being moved in 1928 to Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia. Photograph part of the Doran S. Callahan Photograph Collection, 1890–1900 housed in the Eastern Shore of Virginia Room at the Eastern Shore Public Library. Photo courtesy of the Library of Virginia and reprinted with permission of the Eastern Shore Public Library.

January 4, 1836.

My dear Henry— Yesterday I received your well filled sheet of the 26th, and your letter of the 29th. I have read them already, a half dozen times... Thursday was my birthday. I completed that day my 27th year. To how little purpose have I spent my life. I hope the years which are yet to come to me, be their number many or few, will be spent more profitably to myself and others... I shall count the hours almost the moments, until the arrival of the Wednesday mail; as I expect not only a letter from you, but your speech which you said in your last you should be engaged writing off for the press... Good night my dear dear husband and believe me to be as ever your devoted wife. —*Ann E. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

☞ Misfortune and tragedy, 1837:

During the spring of 1837, before Mr. Wise reached home from Washington, his dwelling-house with nearly all of his valuable books and papers were consumed by fire. His family were removed to a friend's house in the village of Drummondtown, and that house, in a

very mysterious manner, was set on fire also. This so affected the nervous system of his wife, that she never recovered from it, and died in the month of June [May 4] following. She was the mother of seven children, but left only four living, Mary Elizabeth... Obadiah Jennings (the eldest son)... Henry Alexander Wise, Jr... and Ann Jennings Wise, the second daughter... who was an infant at the death of her mother...

—James P. Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*.

Accomack C. H. E. S. Va. Oct. 27th, 1837.

My dear Madam— Often have I undertaken to thank you, affectionately and gratefully, for the kind letter of condolence which your good heart prompted you to write to me last summer. Oh! My dear Madam, you know not how misfortune stunned every faculty and all the energy of my weak spirit. I have not been and never shall be the same man you once knew. Again and again did I try hard to rouse myself, but will you believe me that I wrote not even to Balie Peyton a line until late last month? Judge White's letter was a recipe, yours a balm... I have uplifted a pile, a monstrous weight of business since he directed me to busy myself in the active duties of life, to restore my wounded balance of mind and spirit. God knows care has been heaped upon me— relation after relation, near & dear, has died, one in quick succession after another and their estates have fallen on me to settle. My own affairs have long been neglected... When I got to Balt. [Baltimore] some client stopped me "in transition" as the lawyers say, & carried me on business to Hampton so that I was delayed in reaching *my children* until Monday last. I write by the first mail— ours are bi-weekly only. I found my babes all well but one. My youngest boy [Henry Alexander Wise] is yet pale with a short but severe attack of bilious fever. When the news reached me he was sick I was sure he would die— the fortune of the year has so run with me. Thank God that every one of *her* children are yet spared to me! ...I cannot write a letter now to a friend without sickening with grief... My sister was in Washington a moment, and, though a plain Virginia house-wife, I wanted you to see that she was so. Her domestic habits are all in all to me now. She is very much attached to my children and my youngest— the babe, little Ann E., is now a healthy, fat, fine child. She is nursed by Ann's favorite servant and thrives like a pig on fat meat and milk. I am, at this moment, engaged in writing out an interminable speech which I made at 12 o'clock at night on the 14th inst. You must therefore excuse the incoherence of this epistle & take it, as it was intended, a mere apology for my long apparent neglect. I hope to meet you *at Philippi* next month. In the meantime believe me to desire you all the health & happiness you can enjoy with the Judge, who I hope arrived at home safe & in good health. Yours Truly, *Henry A. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

☞ In the years that followed, some of the most interesting correspondence is from Obadiah Jennings Wise, Henry A. Wise's oldest son:

Henry A. Wise M.C. Washington City, D.C.
Philadelphia, February 27.

My dear Father— I wish to see you very much, pray come and see us as we cannot go to see you but we expect you soon. We are busy attending to our studies. I am learning geography, arithmetic, reading writing and definitions. Sister and I have just traveled through the map of Asia. Give my love to

My dear Madam Henry A. Wise is writing to Mrs. Ann White of Knoxville in response to her letter of condolence after the death of his wife.

Balie Peyton 1803–1878, a Congressman from Tennessee from 1833–1837 and Minister to Chile, 1849–1853.

bilious fever Sometimes misspelled *billious* by one uncle, a term used to generally describe digestive disorders with any, or perhaps all, of the following symptoms— jaundice, constipation, headache, vertigo, anorexia, and diarrhea.

Ann E. Known throughout her life as "Annie," the daughter had been christened "Ann Jennings Wise." Her father's reference to "*Ann E.*" suggests the possible derivation of "Annie." Her mother, Ann Elizabeth Wise after whom she had been named, had died three days after her birth. The use of the name "Ann E.," subsequently spelled "Annie" and with an emphasis on the pronunciation of the "E," would become a lifelong memorial to a Mother whom she never knew. Had it been spelled "Anne," the "e" would have been silent. Her gravestone reads *Annie*.

all enquiring friends, particularly George and Mrs. White. Dear Father please excuse this bad writing for it is my first attempt at letter writing my dear Father, your affectionate son, *O. J. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

Henry A. Wise, Drummond town, Accomack County, Virginia
Philadelphia (not dated)

Dear Father— I have delayed too long replying to your kind and excellent and dear letter— but my dear father that it was want of love from his own loving boy, who loves him better than all the world beside— But the weather has been so fine and when school was out I was so full of play that I knew that you will excuse me. I am glad dear father that the very book that I study at school is the one that you recommended. Tell cousin George that he must not be long in answering my letter. I am very much pleased with my school. I am learning Orthography, reading, writing, Arithmetic, grammar [*sic*], geography history and philosophy. The Miss Sergeants invited us to spend the evening and Mrs. Sergeant sent her love to you. We are all well and join me in love to you dear father. Uncle Tully, Aunt Margaretta Uncle John and Aunt Ann, Aunt Betsey, Aunt Harriet and all my cousins. Write soon dear father to your affectionate son. *O. J. Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

Henry A. Wise M.C. Washington City, D.C.
Philadelphia. December 9, 1839.

Dear Father— And are you really at Washington. I hope you will be able to come and see us for we want to see you very much indeed. Grandma says it is her humble opinion indeed that you ought to come and see your children. We are all well except Henry who has got the jaundice and my teacher says that we will go in Natural History. I have been committing the song of English History which tells me all about all the kings that ever reigned in England which I hope I shall soon have the pleasure of repeating to you. One day when Grandma was singing to little Anne she said Grandma sing about my papa and every time she gets up from saying her prayers she says Grandma I love papa. We all send love. *O. Jennings Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

☞ 1840–1853: The second marriage and Minister to Brazil.

In November 1840 Henry Wise married Sarah Sergeant of Philadelphia. He continued to serve in Congress until after the election of 1843.

his friends Wise was appointed to the post in Brazil by President John Tyler, one of his close personal friends. Wise and his family sailed to Brazil aboard the frigate *Constitution*.

“On Mr. Wise’s return to Congress it was discovered that his physical health was giving away rapidly from the constant excitement of about ten years. Consequently his friends sent his name again to the Senate for the Court of Rio Janeiro... On the 8th day of February 1844, he resigned his seat in Congress, and sailed from New York for Rio in the month of May following his resignation.”

—James P. Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*.

Others were taking note of Henry Wise and the following appeared in 1845:

“In person, he is nearly six feet tall, extremely thin, and has not enjoyed a very great share of good health. His features are strongly marked and expressive; his mouth large

but firmly set; his hair is light and carelessly worn; his forehead high and prominent, denoting strong intellectual powers; his eyes are dark and piercing, and his complexion pale and colorless, and rendered still more pallid by his cravat, which is always white.

In debate, Mr. Wise is particularly happy; his manner is animated, and he easily becomes excited by his subject... As a speaker, he is pleasing, and always commands the fullest attention from his auditors. His peculiar forte is in sarcasm and invective, and on occasions when he is compelled to resort to the exercise of these weapons, he is exceedingly severe and sometimes withering.

Mr. Wise may now be said to occupy a situation seldom attained by public men of our day. He may now be stated to belong to no party, and to be independent of any. His constituents are of all parties, and among them he is uncommonly popular...

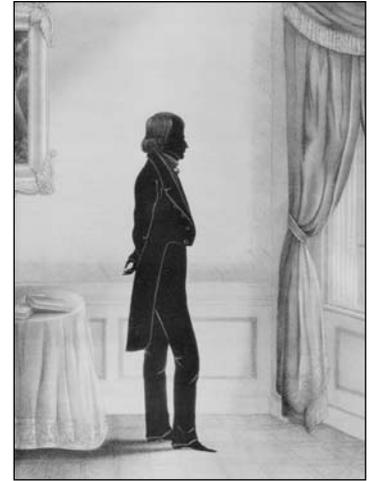
His social and familiar habits, his easy and affable manners, render him at all times an agreeable companion, and the sincerity which characterizes him on all occasions adapts him particularly as a companion and friend. It must be evident to every observing mind, that Mr. Wise possesses talents of the first order, and when the experience of a few years in public life is added to the information he now possesses, he promises to rank high amongst the most talented and distinguished men of our country."

—William H. Brown, *Portrait Gallery—Distinguished American Citizens with Biographical Sketches and Fac-Similes of Original Letters*.

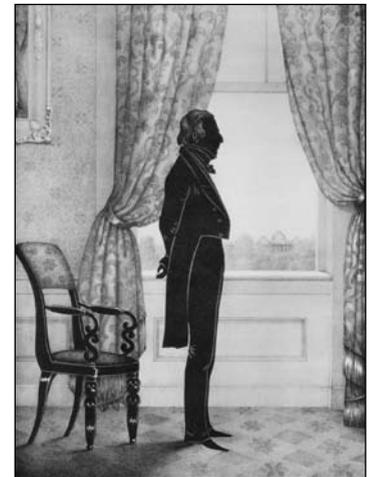
In 1847 Wise returned to Virginia from Brazil and in 1850 he was elected to the State Convention that revised the Virginia Constitution. During that convention he received the news of the death of his second wife, the mother of seven children, only four of whom survived their mother and one of them died later in infancy.

☞ The Virginia Constitutional Convention, Richmond, August 1850:

"A writer of the time, in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, in describing the members of the convention, thus speaks of him [Henry A. Wise]:— 'In appearance he was one of the most remarkable looking men in the Assembly, and would attract attention wherever seen. His face seemed full of cavities, —hollow cheeks, large, hollow eye-sockets, and the most cavernous mouth; when he spoke, the eyebrow seemed thrown up toward the top of his head, and his mouth immensely opened, like a gate on its hinges, so that he appeared to be all eyes and all mouth—two very good features in an orator. His face is full of flexibility and, by the easy play of its muscles, expresses every emotion and passion of the mind. In fact, the whole face speaks in every muscle and fibre of it. When at rest, his relaxed features, tall, loose-jointed figure, and slight, spare form give no promise of physical power; yet the length and frequency of his speech and his earnest, violent gesticulation show that he possesses great power of endurance. From out this cavernous mouth flow streams of eloquence; these hollow eye-sockets are filled up with the blaze of the eye; and the very flexibility of his features adds force and emphasis to his words. His hazel eye, even when quiet, has a daring outlook that well expresses the character of the man; and in his excited moments it blazed and burned in the fire of his own vehemence, as if it would consume all opposition and intimidate all resistance. His action is always abundant and is of the most vehement and excited character. Totally devoid of grace, which his loose, angular figure forbids, it yet possesses much power and eccentric force; his use of the long forefinger reminds us of Randolph, and, like him, he excels in denunciation. His voice is the most perfect and beautiful feature that, as an orator, he possesses; it is at once powerful and sweet,



Henry A. Wise Portrait Gallery—Distinguished American Citizens with Biographical Sketches and Fac-Similes of Original Letters by William H. Brown, Hartford, Connecticut, 1845 (Reissued 1931).



John Tyler Portrait Gallery—Distinguished American Citizens with Biographical Sketches and Fac-Similes of Original Letters by William H. Brown, Hartford, Connecticut, 1845 (Reissued 1931).



Henry A. Wise. Engraved by H. B. Hall & Sons, New York. Used as the frontispiece in *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia* by Barton H. Wise.

as flexible as the muscles and features of his face, and as perfectly under control; it has compass, variety, depth, and clearness, and, besides this, it has that peculiarity of sound or accent which constitutes the winning spell of the orator and which so effectually charms an audience... Mr. Wise spoke on every question that came up, and, in fact, scarcely a day passed that he did not have something to say. His greatest speech was made upon the Basis Question, toward the close of the debate upon that subject, he was five days in delivering it... The effect of his speech was so strikingly evident; and if the true test of an orator is in his power to convince a mixed audience of the truth of his own opinions and to carry with him their attention and their sympathies, then Henry A. Wise is one of the most eloquent men in Virginia.’”

—Barton Haxall Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia*.

~ Letters from two of Henry Wise’s children, Mary Elizabeth and Obadiah, describe the family between 1848 and 1853:

August 5, 1848 ...If Father [Henry A. Wise] leaves Accomac, I hope he will not leave Henry [Henry A. Wise Jr.] there by himself so long; it would do him a great deal of harm. He is a very good boy if he has Father to keep him in order, but he ought not to be there without anyone to command him. As to his going to college next fall, it would be the ruin of him; he must be kept at home a while longer till he learns to be more of a man so far as studying and behaving without being forced to it. Annie has improved with regard to her temper and behavior; altogether Richard is the same sober old-mannish child, but he is more healthy and plays more. Néné is as wild as ever and just as much of a pet with Father. Johnnie is too sweet to describe...

—Mary Elizabeth Wise, as quoted by William M. Adkins in *Obadiah Jennings Wise ’50: A Sketch of His Life*, Indiana University Alumni Quarterly.

Bloomington, April 2nd, 1849.

My dear Father— As the bustle of examinations, exhibitions & moving from one boarding house to another is now completely over; as it is time to send on my quarterly accounts, and moreover as I feel like corresponding with “mine honorsive” here I am snugly seated in the room appropriated to me by mine host (Cousin John Parker’s friend, the worshipful brother John Onchard) surrounded by pen ink &c with little to say, but wishing to say much.

The Philomatheau exhibition came off on last Monday evening. Your two nephews did about as well as any there. Their declamation was about the best on the exhibition. With regard to the composition of their essays, you can have a shame of judging for yourself, as I presume Aunt Margaret will send them on to you... I have come to the sage determination that I will spend this vacation without loafing. I have several tremendous projects on hand, such as making gardens, reading Greek (some question about that though) and— but stop! I’ll let you into a secret which *no one else knows*: your son, has of late taken several small dives into authorship. Besides furnishing several fictions for the *Indiana Tribune*, he has had the pleasure of seeing half a dozen pieces of his own verse in print. I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing so much needed by our country as poetry, and have determined to try my hand at the business. I have commenced a translation of Voltaire’s *Henriade* into verse, which I hope to complete before leaving college. What think you

of it? Please write to me and tell me all about things at home... As the mail closes in about half an hour, and as I have nothing more to say my epistle must be cut short... love to all, Your affectionate son, *O. Jennings Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

January 21, 1850— They always mention, when writing from home the receipt of a letter from you, but that is a very unsatisfactory way of hearing from a brother, particularly one who has always been in every way so closely connected in all my doings and pleasures until you went to college. Indeed, Obe, I have been thinking much of late about the times we have had together, studying, walking, riding, and it seems to me everything we did together, the recollection of it all is so very delightful, I wish we had it to do over. Do you? I cannot believe you will be home next June.

—*Mary Elizabeth Wise Garnett*, as quoted by William M. Adkins in *Obadiah Jennings Wise '50: A Sketch of His Life*.

Bloomington, April 18th, 1850.

My dear Father— I received your last letter, dated April 4th, on Tuesday last. With regard to my extravagance I thank you for your kind reproof; but must say that my extravagance has been owing no more to my *being a child* than to my *being treated as a child*. I have been utterly ignorant as to the state of your affairs. When I left home I knew you to be free from debt... I have heard repeatedly since that you had your hands full of practice, which together with your reputation was increasing daily. All this led me to believe that you were making more than enough for all the necessaries and comforts of the family. And I can not believe that I would knowingly have prevented Henry and Annie from receiving their share of your liberality. As I have done so, I can only promise to try every means in my power when I return home to make amends at least to Annie for the deprivation... I have paid off my debts and have \$20 and some cents remaining. I will try to do on \$150.00 more; but I doubt whether I shall be able to do so. I do not think that my clothes will cost less than 40 or 45 dollars; my winter clothes being nearly all worn out, and my summer ones outgrown. Besides this at the end of the next session I shall owe my washerwoman \$18.00. This bill I have allowed to run on for some time, forgetting sometimes and several times offering to pay her, but she refused, stating that she would prefer to receive it “all in a lump;” afraid most probably that I wished to take it from her. Under the hand of “other expenses” I have included fuel, (which I shall have to use until the middle of May) candles, stationary [*sic*], postage, library subscriptions. The boys are all well. College commences again on Wednesday week. Please write to me and forgive, Your son, *O. Jennings Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

Only, Monday, March 22, 1852.

My dear Father— Having nothing else to interest you, I must give you another detail of farming operations, which will not, I fear be as pleasing as it is interesting, since it is an epitomoe [*sic*] of agricultural disasters. On Monday and Tuesday we managed to finish the guano land, Spenser being too much indisposed to work. On Wednesday we had a perfect storm of wind and rain, which continuing all day, prevented all labor that day. The hands were employed during the better part of Thursday in organizing the fences and

fodder stacks, which suffered severely on the preceding day. A freeze having succeeded (or succeeded rather) the storm. All hands were employed for the rest of the week in cutting and mauling logs for the oat-field fence, which is now partly constructed— that is, it is made about six logs high... On Saturday the snow fell about two inches deep. This morning I had Fred, Spenser and little John Poulson helping to ship the cattle on board William Finney's vessel for *Natts Island*, while the other hands carted out manure. We got them all safely in the hold and then the vessel started round to Toppings Creek to take in the house logs, but ran hard aground where she is now waiting for high water to lift her off... I forgot to tell you that we finished rolling the oats on Tuesday. The box from Philadelphia arrived here today, bringing all the things you sent for by John Sergeant. All are well. Your affectionate son, *O. Jennings Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

Friday, Nov. 6th, 1852.

My dear Father— I take the opportunity, which Jim's departure this evening affords me, to drop you a line. Henry is getting along finely. He is on good terms with all the professors, and has already graduated in French. He has been mainly instrumental in getting up a new literary society, which now rivals in numbers the one previously initiated. He has been elected by its members to deliver an address, in contest against an orator chosen by the other society, on the 22nd February next. I was of opinion that he would make a much better speech by waiting till next year; but, as he will then have to prepare his graduating address, he preferred to take a chance this time.

By this time Obadiah Wise was studying law.

The Judge keeps me busy. Our class, near twenty in number, attends lectures every day in the week, besides the extra duty of the moot court on Saturday... I do not think that I shall need \$300 for this session. Henry will need more. Give love to all. Your affectionate son, *O. Jennings Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

Williamsburg, Jan. 9th, 1853.

My dear Father— ...I spent Christmas week with Uncle John in Princess Anne. All the family were in excellent health except himself— he was confined to his room all the time by a severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism, but was getting better when I left. I am entirely out of money, and I find that Henry is in the same situation. I shall soon owe \$50 for board, Henry has paid his up to the 22nd of February. I also owe \$60 for books... for this debt I gave my note payable at the end of six months— so you see that if it is not convenient for you to let me have it now, the money need not be forthcoming till then. Henry owes I believe, about \$30, in small debts... Our initiation fees &c cost us together about \$30 and my trip to Princess Anne \$15— washing bills \$10. This statement will show how the greater part of our money has gone. We need at present at least \$100–\$200 would perhaps [be] better, as it would enable us to go upon the cash system for the future. The reason why I have not written to you sooner is that I did not know exactly where to find you. All the boys are well. Your affectionate son, *O. Jennings Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

Williamsburg, March 13, 1853.

My dear Father— I received your letter yesterday. I shall certainly graduate in July, when I wish immediately to take out a law license. I should be very

much pleased if you can find nothing better for me to do, to return here next fall, and take the law... Henry returned from Richmond yesterday, where he has been on account of his teeth, for the last few days: they were decaying rapidly and began to be painful to him. I am sorry that I was not aware of the state of his mouth while Dr. S— was here. His teeth cost him \$45, his other expenses \$20, in all \$65. This necessitates a draft for this amount, as soon as you can conveniently send it. I have received but two letters from Washington since I have been here, one from sister and the other from Annie. It is, I expect, my own fault; I have lost the habit of writing affectionate letters, But I trust that you, at least, will believe that, with all my selfishness, I love you dearly, yes more dearly than ever, Your affectionate son, *O. Jennings Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

Williamsburg, April 10, 1853.

My dear Father— Today being my birthday, I have determined to send you a few lines, notwithstanding the fact that I have little or nothing to say... Last week Jimmie and the other two candidates for the degree of A. M., together with myself, were elected by the faculty members of the Phi Beta Kappa Society. How the honor came to be conferred on me, and on no other member of the law class I cannot tell; but I am more the less thankful for it. As you are aware no doubt, it is the most honorable, as well as the oldest and most widely extended literary society in this country. The faculty are determined to make a big show on “the 4th.” They are stimulating the candidates for graduation with present exhortations as well as with prospective gold medals. One or two of them have indicated that a poem on my part would be acceptable. I really don’t believe that I *could* prepare one, even if I had the time and inclination— the poetic fire is so feint within me. My daydreams are becoming daily more prosaic— principally concerning a series of very learned legal arguments to be delivered in future, and I must confess it— of future fees also... I have not set my heart on going abroad... I have but little preference as to which court of Europe I should reside at... though I would somewhat prefer an English or a German residence, the first in order to become acquainted with the English courts, the latter to learn the German language... Give love to all and kiss the children for me. Your affectionate son, *O. Jennings Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

1853–1860

☞ The third marriage:

Only, near Onancock, Va. August 13, 1853.

My dearest Mary Lyons— My heart bounds to you— it wells up to gush forth to you in its fullness & freshness. And is it so— that I am yet blest “in woman & love”? Again, again, again! I thank thee, I bless thee, I praise thee, I love thee. And this is not impious adoration, but is truly a part of the Divinity, which stirs within us— an earnest devotion, satisfying as nature’s law which Heaven approves and sends to earth to light it up and lift us to the grace & gladness & glory above... Yes, Mary Lyons, you have thrice blessed me & “I am yours and you are mine” forever! And this intensity of realization

shall grow with time and deepen... I will teach thee all I know of love like a little child... I was called to dinner. Since I have called Annie to my side and told her all and requested her to write to you. Oh! She is too sweet. The child wept but not bitterly— she kissed me and was happy & recovered herself and immediately wrote the inclosed. It is her own spontaneous self and just what you will always find her— generous, sensible, sensitive, conscientious and Christian-like. [Annie was then 16 years old.] In the midst of this “joy of grief” with her a letter is just handed to me from my son in London— a beautiful & manly letter from one whom you will respect when you know him as you will love Annie on sight. He [Obadiah Jennings Wise] left for Hamburg en route to Berlin July 22nd at 1 o’clock at night...

—Saturday, Aug 14th. I have again slept upon it and talked with Annie, and my dear dear Mary Lyons! I fear not for you nor for my children. You will unite at once by instantaneous fusion with us all. *I feel it so.* I am not a fool in my love. No! Mary Lyons you have only just made me happy, thrice happy in the hope of all in you to make a wife & mother. Say when I may fly to you and say it soon & may God keep you in His keeping forever for your own *Henry A. Wise.*

Washington, August 28th. [1853]

My dear Miss Lyons— Father has just informed me of his engagement to yourself. I hope you will understand me when I confess it is with mixed feeling I think of his marriage. They must arise from selfishness, however for I know it will be better for him and his children to have a good wife and Mother, and from what everyone has told me I feel sure he could not have made a happier choice. May God bless you both and make you as good a Mother to my little brothers and sisters as theirs was to me and He could not give them a greater blessing... Yours, *Mary W. Garnett.*

Mary Elizabeth Wise Garnett,
1829–1898, a daughter of Henry
A. Wise by his first marriage and
married to Dr. Alexander Y. P.
Garnett.

Washington City— Sept 13th, 1853.

My dear Mary Lyons— The Omnibus from Alexandria brought me here early last evening, half sick and more than half sad at waving adieu to that pale face which beamed on me at parting from the Hotel door and which has been before my mind’s eye ever since, waking and last night dreaming. Yes! Last night I did dream of you for the first time and it was a dream which I would *not* have had “all a dream”— it was so bright and beautiful and full of delight. That dream I will tell to you some of these days when it may make you as happy as it did me this glorious morning, so glittering with light and the hopes which light always inspires... I met my nephew at the cars and bade him ride out to see you. I trust he did so and that you found him a promising fellow. He said Dr. Garnett told him to inform *you*, not me, of the newborn grand daughter & the thought of that babe made me anxious to hasten on to Mary [Mary Wise Garnett]. I found her very well, but the child, though very large and apparently healthy, will not live, I think. Why, the Doctors cannot tell. She has sent for a clergyman to christen it & lest it may die, I forego naming it *Mary Lyons*. The mother is perfectly resigned to let it sleep and— wake in Heaven... The *Balt Sun* says I am writing a scathing article against the Pacific R. Road and am soon to lead a Richmond beauty to the altar. How they get hold of those things I can’t tell, but sometimes “what everybody says

must be true.” Speed the day! Say I when I am to be one with my own pure loved Mary Lyons. Your own *Henry A. Wise*.

September 20, 1853.

I do not write to offer you comfort my dear Mrs. Lyons in your sore affliction, for earthly friends can give little or no consolation under such circumstances. I only wish to tell you that you have my sincerest sympathy and love. Much I have thought of you in your trouble & prayed that my heavenly Father would console not only yourself but all the sorrowing ones of your family, and I am sure my prayers will be answered. Father read me your kind message. I love you for it... I had determined before to love you for my father’s sake. I feel sure now that my heart’s warmest affection must be yours for your own sake... Father received a letter from Sister [Mary Wise Garnett] today in which she sent her love and warmest sympathy to you. She too sorrows, her little babe died last Wednesday, and though all must rejoice that it was taken in its purity to God, without ever having known earthly sin and care, still it had its place in a mother’s heart and that heart could not help grieving when it was taken from her. I desire so much to see you, and hope it will not be very long before I shall meet you. My best wishes for your welfare and happiness are always yours and again I assure you that I will do everything in my power to promote the latter. That you may find consolation in your afflictions is the sincere prayer of —Yours Truly & Affectionately, *Annie J. Wise*.

☞ Tragedy in the family, two letters:

Only, near Onancock Va. Sept 24th, 1853.

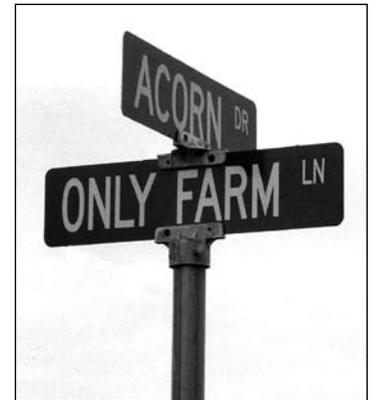
My dear Mary Lyons— ... Mary Garnett has lost her dear little babe & I have just finished a note of condolence to her. Write to her. Write to me. I pray God to guard you... Your Own *Henry A. Wise*.

Only, Oct. 1st, 1853.

My dear Mary Lyons— Annie brings me this letter to inclose to you. It excites me more than I could describe to do so. For two weeks I have not recd. a line from you and my anxiety is almost intolerable. Yet, I am *chained* here! I am *compelled* to remain at home for the present and would fly to you. How are you?— Sick? —Overwhelmed with grief? —Forgotten me? Three packets have come and gone and not a note from you. Sabbath last and Thursday last I was sure of a letter— of some sign or token at least from you and none came. Did you forget to mail your letters Tuesday or Saturday to be certain of reaching our ferry at Norfolk by Friday and by Tuesday? Tuesday week coming, Oct. 11th, I shall leave here for Richmond. May I not? Ah! If tomorrow’s mail should forbid it, I shall be most unhappy. I am very disturbed now. Your own *Henry A. Wise*.

Only, near Onancock, Va. October 6th, 1853.

My dear Mary Lyons— I fear you will tire of my frequent letters, but I am a little sad about you & my solitudes must plead my apology. You have been much distracted and I was not near you and I have been anxious without being able to relieve my doubts or my fears. By the side of me a maid,



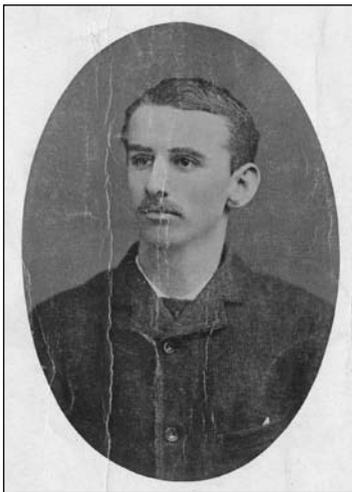
in the bloom of health and childish in age, and cut down; and by your side a youth full— full of hope & promise— to admonish us how short life is & uncertain everything around & about us. This has actually made me nervously anxious about our wedding day. Are you *ever*— *never* to be mine? I have asked that question a thousand times, knowing too how you are & have been lately sorrowing. This has made me jump to work— the work of rapid preparation for your coming & coming soon. The house has been torn up from top to bottom and the work is still going on but will be finished by next week. And I have been pitching my wheat crop and have not much hindrance from interruptions of labor and from the drought this fall. But it will all come right... We must— indeed we *must* be married soon. I shall go on next Tuesday week unless I hear something from you to forbid. I have gone forth to the woods and knelt alone & prayed God *for you*. I weep when the love of you comes right full over me. Your own *Henry A. Wise*.

Only, Oct. 12th, 1853.

My dear Mary Lyons— ... Yesterday I rec'd a letter from Mary Garnett and it inclosed your sweet— exquisitely sweet letter to her on the death of her babe. I gratefully thank you for it. You need not fear, my love— these dear children already all love you and they will all bless you. I *know* they will and am therefore so anxious for you to *come* to them and to come quickly. Mary promises to meet you here. I don't intend that anyone else for some time, except the children, shall be here to divert us in the least from each other. I am your own, *Henry A. Wise*.

Henry A. Wise and Mary Elizabeth Lyons of Richmond were married in November 1853.

Perhaps the most complete description of the Wise family for the 1840s and 1850s is a letter written by Obadiah Jennings Wise to Mrs. John Gadsby Chapman who was living in Rome. An artist, John Gadsby Chapman, 1808–1889, was a close friend of Henry A. Wise and had often visited with the Wise family. Obadiah's letter:



Obadiah Jennings Wise, 1831–1862. Photograph courtesy of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Berlin, Germany, January 5, 1854.

Dear Mrs. Chapman— Six months and more have elapsed since Mrs. Brown, on her return from Italy, delivered me some kind messages from yourself which stirred up a host of old remembrances, and led to repeated determinations to open a correspondence with you. Business, indolence and every other sort of hindering circumstance have continually interposed to prevent the accomplishment of these good intentions, and I am at last moved to the undertaking by the greatest motive power of this life— selfishness. I have a favor to ask of you, of which I will speak directly.

You wish to know what we have all been doing since we parted from you at New York nearly eleven years ago. My energies are entirely insufficient to furnish anything like a satisfactory *exposé* of even the domestic occurrences of our own little family circle during so long a period of time. I can only give you a sketch of the appearance and character of each member of the circle, together with a recital of some of the most important events.

We lived a pleasant life in Brazil. The only great grief that befell us was the news of the death of my uncle Mr. Tully R. Wise, which reached us shortly

after our arrival. We luxuriated in a climate and scenery which I cannot believe to be surpassed by those of Italy itself— made but little advance in social intercourse with the Portuguese inhabitants, who were inapproachable and although we mingled considerably with a mixed society of English, American, French and Spaniards, permanent and transitory, were obliged to find in each other our chief resources of entertainment.

Father employed his energies in exercising a strict patriarchal government over a large household composed of various nations and complexions and speaking three languages which he did not understand, —in cultivating two or three acres of garden land, —in suppressing the slave trade, —and in asserting and maintaining the rights and privileges of our republican citizens. Our sojourn in the country was marked by two additions to the family —a flaxen haired, blue-eyed girl, whose real name is Margaret, but who is known to this day only by the name of Néné (the Portuguese synonym for “baby”) —and a hearty *buster* of a boy, who received the bluff and appropriate cognomen of “John.”

Early in the spring of 1847, I left the rest of the family at Rio, and betook myself to the University at Bloomington, Indiana, at the head of which was Father’s old master, the late Dr. Andrew Wylie. Entering a class of which I was much in advance, and relishing the independence of college life and western manners, I was soon at my ease there.

The rest of the family returned home in the fall and in spite of positive orders to the contrary, found me on the ground to welcome their arrival; —a matter which, you may be sure, was the immediate cause of very severe parental admonitions. A few days at home brought to my eyes the fact that, during the passage home and for some time previous to it, Dr. Garnett (a young naval surgeon from Essex County Virginia) and my sister Mary had done some damage to each other’s hearts, —and in time, that a matrimonial engagement was pending. Having sufficiently bedeviled the young lady about this delicate situation of affairs, I returned to college, leaving my brother Henry in an indignant state of mind because he was not allowed to accompany me. The fact was that, although we loved each other dearly, our fraternal affection was enlivened by almost daily pugilistic encounters; —so it was thought best to keep us apart.

I did not return home again until my college term was over, varying it only by a long visit to my uncle Dr. Jennings, at Nashville, Tennessee. He impressed me as a most incorrigible old bachelor, which impression he has since (some two years ago) disproved by taking to wife a comely young damsel of seventeen summers, who, in addition to her other charms, threw into his possession a comfortable estate of some \$50,000. The Dr. is now the only surviving member of my mother’s family. Just before leaving Rio de Janeiro, I received the news of my aunt Sarah’s death. Shortly after arriving at college, I wrote to my aunt Mary, and was answered by a black-sealed letter from my aunt Rebecca, announcing that aunt Mary died shortly before my letter was received. My answer to my aunt Rebecca’s letter did not reach her before her own death.

My college career was not very creditable as far as acquirement and distinction were concerned. Ardently attached to my dear old master, Dr. Wylie, for whose memory I still retain the liveliest affection and admiration, —I devoted myself particularly to his instructions— political, metaphysical and

religious and caught from his clear head and manly heart those moral and religious convictions which are to me now as a “pillar of strength.” Snubbed by all the other professors for neglect of their departments, I became an active member of one of the debating societies of the college, —wrote quite a quantity of very mediocre political essays, and having thus wasted most of my time in declamation and dreaming, at last took my diploma almost *de gratia*.

I returned home in 1850, and found Henry more than six feet high (over-topping me by more than three inches) —Annie almost a woman, and sister Mary a wife and mother. Within a few months after my return my stepmother died suddenly. Blessings on her memory! —for nine years she loved us all with a mother’s love and cared for us with a mother’s care; and her children are as dear to me as if one mother had given us birth. During the following year we also lost little Spencer, the baby who was born while I was at college. He was a black-eyed little boy with curly hair, and resembled very much the picture Mr. Chapman painted of me at three years old.

I remained at home for two years, acting as family tutor, farmer, law student and lieutenant of militia, —all of which occupations I partially attended to by fits and starts.

In the fall of 1852, I went to the law school at Williamsburg Va., which is under the direction of Judge Scarburgh, a gentlemen with whom you were doubtless acquainted in Accomac some twenty years ago, and who was then Mr. George P. Scarburgh. Determined to compensate in some degree the mortification which my previous neglect to study had caused to Father, I worked diligently, and in nine months time took my law diploma and law license. Just after I obtained these, President Pierce was kind enough to tender me an appointment to the office which I now hold and father consented that I should take it for four years, under the condition that any leisure hours should be applied to a study of the civil law.

A short time after my arrival here, I received a letter from Father, announcing his approaching marriage with Miss Mary Lyons of Richmond, Virginia. Except a correspondence which I have had with that lady since the marriage, I am entirely unacquainted with her; —but the letters which I have received from all quarters are such as to assure me that Father has made a most excellent selection. His wife is without fortune, but bears the character of a pious and amiable woman, —and as she is already 38 years of age no inconvenience can result from too great a disparity in this respect. Thus having brought matters up to the present time, I will try to give you an idea of the changes which time has wrought upon each one of us.

Father’s hair is now plentifully mixed with grey, his form is not quite so straight as it used to be, and he is obliged to use glasses when he reads. His mind is in the ripeness of its vigor, and his energy is as unshaken as ever. He is even a better orator than he used to be, and much more of a philosopher. Since he returned from Brazil he has devoted himself to the cultivation of a farm on Onancock creek, and to his law practice. During the time, he has held office only for one year. Aiming all his energies at striking from our state constitution the aristocratic features which it so long displayed, he was elected a member of the constitutional convention 1850–51. Acknowledged as a leader of the reform party in that convention, he achieved the proudest triumph of his life, carrying through the principal reform measures, in spite of an original majority of seventeen against them. His great speech was on the question

of the basis of representation, and for five successive days an overcrowded audience favored him with its attendance and applause. Nor has he at any time neglected either state or general politics. He was a democratic elector in the two presidential campaigns of '48 and '52, and has at all time placed his shoulder to the wheel whenever political issues of any description have been in agitation. I have just read two long long letters which he has lately published— one is on the slavery question, and the other is a blow which he has dealt with all his strength at the new political association of Know Nothings. I have also just received the news of his nomination as the Democratic candidate for Governor of Virginia, and do not doubt that he will be elected next spring by a large majority.

Don't blame me for boasting in this way, for I am very proud of him, —and he is, as he always was, the dearest and best of fathers.

You would know my sister Mary at a glance. Mr. Chapman's portrait of her is still an excellent likeness. She has also preserved the cheerfulness and truthfulness of her childhood, —and she possesses more of Father's decision and energy than any of the rest of us. She has two children, a boy and girl. Her husband is an estimable gentleman, and is rapidly making a fortune in the practice of his profession at Washington.

Henry is very tall and very slender, and as much like Father as he used to be. The most *striking* feature of his character is an unconquerable pugnacious tendency. On returning from college I was obliged in self defence to give him two sound drubbings. At seventeen years of age, he administered a caning to his schoolmaster, and commenced making stump speeches. These evidences of precocity induced a family consultation, in which it was determined to send him to the Virginia Military Academy at Lexington. After a few months residence at this place he was courtmartialed [*sic*] and dismissed for a slight mistake— that of fixing his bayonet in one of the cadets instead of on his musket. He then went to William and Mary College, where a year's intimacy with the able and pious President of that university, Bishop Johns, awoke him to religious convictions. He joined the Episcopal church, determined to enter the ministry and applied himself so intently to his studies that his health has lately begun to fail, and he has been obliged to leave college and take my old part of farmer and schoolmaster at home, where he will remain a year to recruit his strength.

Annie is the beauty of the family. Her face is a perfect oval— her hair a light chestnut, and although her forehead is too large for the artist's standard of female beauty, yet the expression of her large dark eyes, her long jetty eyelashes and black and well penciled eyebrows, together with the perfect regularity and fine chiseling of the rest of the features, set off by a complexion very much like my mother's was— all this makes up a very lovely face. She is also taller than Sister Mary, who is rather inclined to the *petite*. Annie is also inclined to be a blue, scribbles verses and puzzles me with the toughest sort of metaphysical problems. In spite of these foibles, however, she is a dear affectionate sister and, I believe, a sincere and earnest Christian. She is still at school, and will not be set free from it till next spring.

Dick is the blue-eyed baby you saw at New York. He is a queer boy, very quiet and old, manish [*sic*] in his ways, but a good child and evinces much decision of character. His brother John worships him.

John is a thickset ruffian with a head much too large for his body (when

he was six years old, I could wear his hat). He overflows with animal spirits and doesn't fear the devil— and has a sharp grey eye with a light in it that looks like Father's: this is perhaps the reason why the latter considers him the smartest of all his children.

Néné is perfectly blonde. She has a *retrousé* nose and is not pretty; but she is as agile as a deer and as full of deviltry as a young fox.

I received several days ago a letter from Father, in which he says—

“Henry is at home teaching and taking care of Richard and Johnny. Henry's health is improving and I hope his energy is coming back to him. Richard is an *intense* child and John a *locomotive*! Néné is the dearest little witch in the world and is constantly and inseparably with her mother. Annie is now well, doing her duty faithfully and dutifully at school in Richmond. Her health was bad last winter. Mary is the same sterling woman, —much loved and respected by your mother, to whom she has been devotedly kind, and she is as hard in health as she is firm in principle...

There! I have given you a sketch of all of them— such a sketch as I would give to no one but a valued friend, —for they are the dearest treasures I have and I hold them sacred in my heart of hearts.

But perhaps you'd like to have an additional portrait— that of the humble indicter of these lines. Very well: You must know, in the first place, that I have lost all my beauty (I am vain enough to believe that I formerly possessed an uncommon share of the commodity). Picture to yourself a man 5 feet 9 inches tall, with an attenuated frame, rather short in the legs and very long in the arms, —a small head, —a hatchet face embellished with a large nose, hair inclined to curl and very coarse and bushy— *voilà tout!* If asked for a picture of my moral disposition I would only say with Wilde—

“I never knelt at glory's shrine,
To wealth I never bowed the knee,
Beauty has heard no vows of mine.
I love thee, ease and only thee!”

Indeed, if circumstances permitted it, I should be apt to sink into a Sybarite; but something in the shape of moral sentiment and filial duty is slowly converting me into a s-t-e-a-d-y, r-o-u-t-i-n-e businessman. You may be surprised at my temerity in presenting this commonplace picture to the eye of a lady whose sentiment and taste are those of a cultivated artist, and who is the wife of a great artist; —but honest truth dictates the measure and I have long since ceased to be a coxcomb.

Now to the immediate cause of this letter. —It is barely possible that I may soon start for Italy. If I do, I shall accompany some friends, who will leave here next week —whether I go or not. Now it is most probable that I shall not be able to go, —and if I do go, I am an independent bachelor— sufficiently able to take care of myself under any circumstances: but it is not so with my friends— ...The party will be at Rome on the 11th of February next. They are anxious to have apartments secured, if any are to be rented *at that time*; but are willing to take the risk of procuring apartments after their arrival, rather than go to the expense of renting them at once to be kept vacant until then... ...I will be very grateful for any attention which Mr. Chapman and yourself will show the party in question during their stay in Rome. I think it hardly possible that I shall accompany them.

I shall be much disappointed if this letter does not insure me a correspon-

dence with you. Rest assured that you have all never ceased to be remembered and loved in Accomac. Mr. Chapman's pictures have looked down upon us continually, and your names are household words around our fireside. Some time ago, we had several family readings of Mr. Chapman's letters, which were forwarded to Father by their mutual friend, Mr. Holmes Conrad, to whom they were addressed. I remember in one of them Mrs. Chapman expressed his intention of making an artist of Jack...

Remember me affectionately to Mr. Chapman and the boys— also to the little girl with whose name and face I am as yet unacquainted, —and believe me, Yours very truly, *O. Jennings Wise*

To: Mrs. John G. Chapman, at Rome. (Virginia Historical Society)

☞ Letters from Annie Wise:

Richmond, February 6, 1854.

My dear Father— I received your letter yesterday afternoon and must acknowledge that it worried me a great deal, as I do not think that Mrs. B— was the right person to inform you of my being “too delicate” to remain at school. But I must tell you at once what Dr. Conway's opinion is, for as soon as I read your letter I wrote a note to him requesting that he would come around here this morning. He left about a half an hour ago and I will tell you now his message, word for word as nearly as possible. He said to tell you and Dr. Garnett that in the beginning of the winter (or rather at Christmas) I had quite a severe attack of cold accompanied with fever and a very bad sore throat, but that the fever soon left me as also did all other symptoms of cold except an irritation of the throat and a cough...I became so much better that he thought further treatment useless. (He did not see me again for some time, and in the mean while the weather being very changeable I caught slight colds which always settled in my throat but as the annoyance from it was very slight, I did not call in Dr. Conway.) But (to continue the Dr.'s message) that the last attack I had, had again thrown me back, and as my cold and cough still cling to me and [illegible] me for my regular school duties for a time at least, that it would be better for me to go home, as change of air and riding on horse-back would benefit me, though he does not think my health in any very immediate danger at all, and that by proper exercise and following his prescription (which is pretty much the same as Dr. Garnett's) I can recover here. He also said to tell you that this winter in Richmond had been a very trying one for any body's constitution and to tell Dr. Garnett that his prescription is exactly what I now require and what he would have prescribed for me before I had not become so much better.

And now dear Father, hear what I have to say— I cannot tell you how it would distress me to give up my present course of studies and though perhaps for a week or so, I cannot attend the school room as regularly as usual, still I can attend to my music and French, and recover just as well as at home, and though Dr. Conway thinks it would be better for me to be in the country, still he says there is no doubt but what by care and prudence, and not applying myself to my studies too much for a week or so, will get well, and then too Father, the spring weather will soon be here. At any rate please let me stay until you and Mother come up the last of this month, and then if I am not well you can take me home. Last week I did suffer a great deal from my cough,

but that is now better, though still troublesome, and I have no doubt but what it will leave me soon. I really think that the disappointment from leaving school will be just as bad for me, as allowing me to stay here... Mrs. B— says to tell you that if she had thought it really necessary for me to go home she would have written you word. But if you think I must return I will try to do so cheerfully and I can easily go on to Washington before the last of this week and meet you there... Your affectionate child, *Annie J. Wise*. —Let me hear from you Father at once.

February 6, 1854.

Dear Father— Your letter has just been handed me dated from Accomac. And as I see you say Dr. Garnett thinks I ought to leave Richmond I suppose I must go. My cough is caused by a tickling in my throat which Dr. Conway says is bronchitis. If you wish me to join you in Washington you had better telegraph to me tomorrow and I can return with Maria H—'s brother who is now here. —Your daughter *Annie*.

Richmond, February 21, 1854.

My dear Father— I am writing to you sitting up in bed for I am sorry to say that I have again been sick, though by no means seriously so. The weather for the last two weeks has been so very changeable, that it has caused me to take cold, and this is the second day that I have been in bed. I was quite sick yesterday and last night with fever and *aching in my bones*, but though somewhat weak, I am better today, Dr. Conway having prescribed a hot foot-bath...

Dear Father, when are you coming to Richmond? I want to see you so much, and have thought about you and all of home, all the time since I have been sick. When you do come here, be sure to bring Mother with you, —it will make your coming *doubly welcome*... The intermediate examination is now very near... I know that I have *really studied* far more than I ever did before and have learnt some things. I think I shall stand it about as well as any of the girls. Indeed Father, though I do not always succeed, I do try to do my duty.

...I am tired and weak, and must therefore stop. Kiss all at home for me, and give my love to the servants and Eliza. Also give my love to Aunt Harriet... God bless you my darling Father. Write when you care to. —Your own affectionate child, *Annie J. Wise*.

☞ Letters from Mary Lyons Wise:

Only, March 3rd, 1854.

Shall I address you as My dear Husband— the first time I have used that *comprehensible* word which conveys to *me* so much of love and trust. You did not expect to hear from us so soon but a letter came from Annie this evening, which I am anxious for you to see. I hope you will go on to Richmond. You can then better judge her condition. I received a letter from Wm. Henry Lyons dated Feb 26th— he says Annie has been staying with Mary several days, and has been quite sick with a cold, but when he wrote, was “nearly well.” I also received an affectionate letter from Henry and one came to you from Mrs. Sergeant, the chief object of which was to ask you to send the children to Phila, the first of April. The children are all hanging about me, (just after supper)— Eliza begging them to go upstairs but they are not inclined to obey the summons. Johnny is pretending to have the nightmare, and can't be awakened, both Jim and Eliza

Eliza in some letters *Ida*, was a white nurse from Philadelphia, who began working for Henry A. Wise when he married Sarah Sergeant who had also come from Philadelphia. After Sarah Sergeant died Eliza stayed with the family during Wise's third marriage, throughout the Civil War, and then, in her old age, she was cared for by Annie Jennings Wise Hobson.

Mrs. Sergeant the grandmother of Henry Wise's children by his second marriage to Sarah Sergeant.

are shaking him. Ah! He is up with a scream of laughter, and I hear his sweet voice singing along the stairs. Richard is very busy writing by my side... Néné is incessantly calling out “Mother, Mother” so you can form a pretty good idea of our position tonight... Today I have been in the garden with George, but he don’t like “Book gardening.” Write me, if only a line. Give my brother my affectionate love. The children send much love. Mine to all at the Dr’s. Good night. May angels guard you, prays, your devoted wife, *M. L. Wise*.

Washington Sept. 30th 1854 ... Dr. Garnett is very kind indeed— he is looking at my case, not doing much yet. He begs you will send him your “Know-Nothing” letter to read before you publish it. He wrote an article for the *Enquirer* against your opponent & it was too caustic that Mr. Payor would not publish it. Please don’t become too much excited in speaking. I am afraid you will injure yourself... When do you think you may be here! ...I told dear Johnny & Richard that they should not go into the bush alone, or go shooting without Henry till I got back, tho’ they protested that “Papa” said they might go. Néné is well & happy. The waning light reminds me ’tis time to say Adieu. May a kind Providence watch over & guide you tonight— Your devoted wife, *M. L. Wise*.

Only, Jan 8th, 1855.

My beloved husband— The Boat did not cross on Friday, consequently I received no letter from you yesterday. I did not bear my disappointment as I should... You have hardly time to think of a little scene, “way across the Bay,” where a poor sick good for nothing mother reclines on a couch, the elder son reading aloud, one son sitting at her feet & one dear little fellow, the father’s *softened* image, lying by her side... Johnny enclosed his first attempt at letter writing— I hope you won’t think it is Dutch! I have written to ask Willie to hire me a cook. Mrs. Poulson has just left me— she is a kind neighbor... I wrote to you on Saturday. If you return through Richmond please bring me something interesting and instructive to read. Today is gloomy without... —Your devoted wife, *M. L. Wise*.

Johnny John Sergeant Wise, born 1846, son of Henry A. Wise and Sarah Sergeant Wise.

Only, Jan. 13th, 1855.

My dear Husband— Richard insists on sending his letter, and as it is *unique* in its style, I enclose it for your amusement. I hope he will soon be able to write you a better one. He would tell you I was sick, but today I am much better, tho’ compelled to lie in bed—

...I am not depressed. My firm trust is in the strong arm of the Lord Jehovah. I am resigned to whatever he deems best for me... May the Lord speed you in your work & undertake for you is the constant prayer of your devoted wife. The children are with me frequently and read to me. I wish you could have seen them last night— all on my bed, while Richard read aloud. Henry will write you of domestic matters. I can’t write more now... Take care of yourself & please don’t speak too vehemently. God bless you my husband, now & forever... —Your own wife. *M. L. Wise*.

Richard Richard Wise, born 1843, son of Henry W. Wise and Sarah Sergeant Wise.

Only, Jan. 17th, 1855.

I have only heard from you once my dearly loved husband, since we parted, but I must again send my little messenger to seek you out, and ask for tidings of your precious self. I am constantly thinking and dreaming of you. Last

night I dreamt we were traveling together in the water, had some alarm, but were safely put on shore. May it be prophetic that we may be safely landed at last, on the “fair shores of Canaan.” The children have just left me, after saying their lessons, & Néné written a *nice* letter to Annie. Richard begs so hard to say his English lessons to me that I have consented to it. He does not like Henry & treats him so badly. Today I am much better, but am keeping very quiet and don’t intend to work about till you get home. Dr. Lyons has only paid me one visit. I was suffering so much that Mrs. Poulson urged me to send for him. Mrs. P— has been very kind to me... Eliza is very attentive to me indeed. I take Dr. Garnett’s pills every day... Be careful of yourself my dear husband. I shall try to get well ere you return & trust you may find everybody and everything doing well. I can’t get a cook... George has nearly finished the fruit trees. I am putting him about the garden. ...I can’t write more now. Do write to me my dear Husband. I feel that you will succeed. At early dawn I have thoughts of you ever since you left me & often at the midnight have too. I am always your devoted wife. *M. L. Wise.*

Jan 19th, 1855.

Tonight, I hope you reach Lynchburg, my wandering husband so that you may take time to rest and refresh yourself for tomorrow’s appointment. I don’t know why your letters have not reached me, as the papers & letters, both North & South, have arrived regularly for the last two weeks. I feel *somewhat anxious* about you, as I did not hear from you & the papers told me you did not meet the people in Petersburg by appointment... By tomorrow you will have received two letters from me and one from Néné & Johnny. I have sent two to Charlottesville. What would I not give to be with you tonight. Probably you are cold & wearied & have not a comfortable room, whilst I am sitting by *your fire*, everything around me, a little black sketch before me, reminding me of “one I love so dear.” The children have gone down to supper & much to their delight have Peggy Bagswell as their guest— a few moments since, I had them all sitting by my side, save Johnny, who was in my lap talking of you. They are now entertaining Miss Peggy with their books... Henry Baine has been in my room tonight, giving me an account of matters on the farm... You have 6 white lambs and 1 black one— one was born dead. The carpenters & bricklayers have neither appeared yet. I have tried to make George fasten up the broken gates, but the sheep will steal in, and despair me of all my lily flowers... they have dainty appetites. I wish they would comfort themselves on myrtle. I have forgotten to tell you that I am walking about my room a *little* today. I feel almost well again... The children I have had with me constantly— teaching them & reading to them. Néné has read to me frequently and is behaving much better than she did shortly after you left us. I have never seen a child who so *detests* books as she does... —*M.W.*

☞ Letters from Annie Wise:

Richmond, January 30, 1855.

My dear Father— It is not without consideration that I have concluded to write you this letter. Every week has of late brought me a letter from home stating that Mother was confined to her bed, & I cannot tell you how unhappy it makes me feel to think of her as sick & alone while I am here enjoying every

pleasure & blessing, gratifying my tastes and ambitions, when I feel assured that my presence at home is so much needed and could contribute a great deal to the happiness of those I love. On the first of March the half session here will be completed & I now leave it for you to say dear Father whether I had not better leave school at that time & return to Only. You know that I am as ambitious to cultivate my mind as you are desirous that I should do so, —that the pursuit of knowledge is to me a great pleasure, and you cannot therefore infer that I am wearied of school-life, when I tell you that on the whole I would prefer returning home. Let me give you my reasons, & I then leave it for you to decide for me. If Mother still continues sick, she will (I presume) be obliged to again consult the Physician in Philadelphia, & the household at home would be left to manage itself, & the children to run wild; if I am there I can prevent both. Even if Mother does not go to Philadelphia she is too delicate, too little capable of bearing fatigue & of exertion to have the care of the *ménage* & to be constantly watching & training the children; if I was with her I could assist her in both, & in so doing could be training my own mind, heart and body. Néné particularly is now at an age when she requires constant watching & instruction, —and remember my dear Father that I am no longer a child... That I would like to finish the course here I do not deny, but by proper diligence at home I do not think that I should lose a great deal by returning there soon. From my experience last year I am convinced that I could not remain here during the month of June, so that I should lose but three months of the session. Music is the only study which I should materially lose in at present, & that at some future time I could make up for. I could take a selection of French books home with me & would regularly correspond in French with Mrs. V— (my present teacher) ...And lastly I feel more and more each day how greatly I need physical strength, & am convinced that the confined life of the school-room does me no good bodily. I need active & constant exercise which it is here impossible to take. The weather during the Spring in Richmond is also very trying to my throat on account of the constant dampness which pervades the atmosphere. I have now given you my views dear Father, & leave it for you to decide “the question.” ...Please reply to this at once, as Mrs. P— could probably supply my place if she knew in time whether I will certainly leave. I should have written to you before but never knew where you were. I often think of your labors & the fatigue which you are undergoing & wish that I could prevent both. I have written somewhat hurriedly having a recitation to prepare for. God bless you dear Father. —Your devoted child *Annie J. Wise*.

Richmond, February 6, 1855.

My dear Father— ...Every week brings me the tidings from Only that Mother is constantly sick and confined to her couch— and so miserable does it make me to think of her as sick, suffering, and alone, so fully am I convinced that home is now my proper sphere of duty that I am willing, even prefer, to return there at the end of this half session... I wish you to reply at once dear Father, as Mrs. P— may have to refuse new boarders if I do not leave, & if I do she can by knowing in time supply the vacancy which my departure would occasion... I now leave it for you to decide what I am to do, & shall anxiously await your reply. I often think of you dear Father amidst your labors & wish that I could share your fatigue. That God will bless and protect you is ever the prayer of Your devoted Child, *Annie J. Wise*.

☞ Mary Lyons Wise:

Writing to Joseph Fuqua on November 14, 1855, Henry A. Wise described his wife's condition:

My dear Sir— I got home from Washington, last Saturday, and found yours dated the 1st and 27th October. I did not go to Bedlam for politics but to see my sweet, suffering wife who has been a patient there for months in the hand of the Doctor. Thank God! She is now better and may be able to go with me to Richmond at the end of the year..." (Library of Virginia)

Mary Lyons may have been an invalid much of the time, and was often sick with diarrhea, which at the time was treated with opium. As described in George B. Wood's *Treatise on the Practice of Medicine*, 1858, diarrhea was treated as follows: "In bilious diarrhea, with bright-yellow or green passages, a gentle cathartic may first be administered with or without laudanum, and then small doses of calomel and opium, about the sixth of a grain of the former to the twelfth of a grain of the latter, for example, every hour or two... [after discussing other remedies]. With all these remedies it is usually proper to combine opium." There is a clear reference to opium in Annie Jennings Wise Hobson's *Diary*, Chapter 9, written at Eastwood where Mary Lyons visited during the Civil War. Several pages have been removed from the diary suggesting that someone may have wanted to delete the mention of opium. —*Editor's note.*

☞ Two letters about a letter:

February 3rd, 1855. [Mary Lyons Wise to Henry A. Wise]
The papers tell me you are doing too much & will break down. Please don't speak all the way home, let the Democrats do something for themselves. Richard and Néné have gone to spend the day with "Peggy." Johnny didn't care to go, and is busy waiting on me— he is the most energetic & attractive child I ever saw, is bad sometimes like other children, but his very badness has a charm about it! Now you'll say I am partial. I am, but he studies well & if I reprove him he thinks it all right and behaves so properly that I can hardly refrain from putting him in my heart and kissing him while in the same act of looking *grave displeasure*. He wrote you his first letter on the 8th Jan., enclosed in mine. You have not received them I suppose, but he watches the mail with the utmost intent for a reply... The garden is being prepared for peas, cabbages and I wish your oats were in. Unless Monday should be cold I suppose Henry will have them hard at work finishing them. I have written twice to Obe since you left me, enclosed one of your letters to him and gave him everything I could gather of your movements & probable success. I wrote to Mr. Parker to send *my* sheep by Cpt. Hopkins. He wrote back a very polite note, offering to do anything for me, and informing me that he sent the animals in November... Your sheep look very well— they pay me frequent visits, attracted by the pretty prospect & prettier shrubs. If you have any *change to spare* won't you get me a few flower seed in Richmond... Adieu. May heaven bless you & speed you safely to your wife. *M. L. Wise.*

Lynchburg, Va. January 19th, 1855.

My dear "Manchild" John— Your note was the sweetest note in the world,

except Mother's and Néné. Do, my boy, take care of my lambs— your lambs. I will pay you and black John a nine pence for every one you save... You must not join your words so close together that two words seem one word. But you did first rate for the first trial, and I have no doubt that you will be a full man by Mother's training, if you will but mind her & attend your book. Now, how do you get around my wife so that she can't whip you when you are bad? Don't you see how she loves you? Then you must love her... Kiss Mother & Richard & Néné all for me. Why don't Richard write? Be good children, Take care of Mother for your father, *Henry A. Wise*.

Feb. 12th 1855.

I fear you will be quite exhausted reading my numerous letters... I only know I feel like reading one from you ever day, but alas I am a "forlorn woman" (and not such a *belle* as you are.) ... On Saturday I wrote you that my *sickness*, after lasting 7 days, has passed away. Today I am compelled to lie down because it has returned. Why, I know not, for I have not left my room since the 3rd February & then only went to the parlor. I have no pain, no uncomfortable feeling, but a little debility from this continued drain on me. Henry encloses a letter from Phil— which came last night... The ice-house is full, aren't you glad? I can't write anymore... Why don't your other letters come. Your devoted *M. L.*

☞ A letter from one brother to another:

Berlin, September 18th, 1855.

Dear brother John— I was very glad to receive your letter of last June, —glad to see that you can write me a letter all by yourself without spelling a single word wrong, and in a handwriting just about as good as your elder brother himself can scratch off; and above all I was glad to learn by it that my dear old *Buster* is just what he used to be, and still loves me well enough to quarrel because I don't write to him. But, John you're a savvy dog— just as savvy as you ever were. What business have you got telling me that "I think myself so grand that I can't write to a little boy in old Virginia"? Eh! Sir, what do you mean? Don't you see that that isn't the style of respect and reverence, and all that sort of thing, in which you ought to address your elder? And besides, it is all your own fault that I didn't write to you. Don't you remember that you wrote to me last winter a year ago, and asked me to get you a little book like the German boys read out of? Well, I kept putting off writing to you to see if I couldn't find one to suit, and I can't now. So, I have just picked over a pile of newspapers to get two or three funny ones for you. I think you will like the pictures. The reading is very funny too, and you must get some Dutchman to translate it for you, —and if you'll write to me again, I'll send you some more. And when I come home I'll bring you a parcel of books, —and you'll have to learn German, so as to read them. And I've got a whole pile of pictures. When I went traveling last year, I bought pictures of all the places I came to. I've got about two hundred of them, and I'm going to have them all bound in a book; so that we can look over them and talk about them, and search out all the places on the map. Won't that be nice? I send you with this a letter for Mother; and you must tell Néné and Dick to write to me, and give my love to Ida; —and when you write to me again, you must tell me what you are going to do with all the horses when you go to Richmond. Your affectionate brother, *O. Jennings Wise*. (Virginia Historical Society)

The Campaign for Governor

James Hambleton's description of the campaign in 1856:

Mr. Wise is five feet eleven inches high; his average weight is 130 pounds; he is remarkably lean; was originally fair skinned, but is now swarthy, his hair is a light auburn, and was, when young, almost flaxen, which he generally wears long, and behind his ears; his head is large, with great depth between the temples; his forehead is low, but broad; his eyes large, gray and deep set, arched by a heavy and remarkably expressive brow, which by turns shows all the workings of the inner man; his nose is large and prominent, and is what might be termed a *Virginia nose*; his mouth is capacious; his lips rather thick; his jaws lank and florid; chin broad and prominent, with furrow from the centre downwards; he was originally very strait and active, but begins to stoop a little. Upon the whole he is not a handsome man, but one that will in any assemblage impress the beholder with his manly and defiant features. He is an excessive chewer of tobacco, but never smokes, and rarely drinks anything of an alcoholic character. Mr. Wise is remarkably abstemious and regular in all his habits except chewing tobacco.

Shortly after he became Governor, Wise County, Virginia, was named after Henry A. Wise.

Thus we have sketched, in as succinct a manner as possible, the life of one of the most illustrious men ever reared in this commonwealth. Mr. Wise combines qualities that eminently befit him to steer the helm of State through troubled times, especially through this threatening crisis. Thoroughly acquainted and largely experienced in the machinery of government, possessing wide and comprehensive views of the requirements of the nation, firm, decided and inflexible, the fearless tribune of the people, he is competent to the highest duties of State. His course, triumphant defence of the Democratic faith in the late gubernatorial campaign in this State, entitle him to the highest consideration and lasting endearment of all who live and wish to perpetuate the Union of the States.

Jefferson has made his memory immortal as the author of the Declaration of Independence and Religious Toleration; Mason as the author of the Bill of Rights; Jackson by severing Bank and Government; and Henry A. Wise by "crushing out," from all law-abiding States, that most detestable, insidious, loathsome, Protean-like, baneful, and contemptible of all isms—Know Nothingism. He is the great benefactor of the people of the nineteenth century. Long may he live to enjoy with his fellow citizens the fruits of his labours. May he wear, with republican simplicity and fidelity, the honors of his country, and preserve unsullied and untarnished those that still await him.

—James P. Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*.

Ex-Governor William E. Cameron describing Wise's campaign for Governor:

He was then in the prime of life, and in person, manner, voice, and mental equipment the ideal leader of a forlorn hope. Elected to Congress in 1833, he had, by lengthy service in that body and by intimate association with the ruling intellects of the age, acquired knowledge of public affairs and a readiness in debate which gave the fullest play to his natural powers of oratory. Tall, lithe, yet muscular, a frame of steel, knit with nerves; his face, clean-shaven, had the rigid lines of a classic cameo, but his expression varied to suit his rapid moods so that the auditor could almost anticipate his words. His gesture was eloquence itself, powerful, yet restrained. His command of language was unequalled... His voice, too, had the compass of an organ pipe, and ranged from the persuasive softness of a lute to the metallic ring of the bugle note. Add to all this the magnetism which defies analysis, which forces other men to listen

and then compels them to believe; a courage as uncalculating as that of a sea-hawk, a strength of conviction as absolute as ever sustained a martyr at the stake; and there you have an imperfect portrait of the man who flung himself single-handed against an epidemic of fanaticism (the Know-nothings), and won the fight... The model of a campaign speaker and a master of invective, Wise was in every way fitted to strike terror to the hearts of the members of the new secret order, and from the Chesapeake to the banks of the Ohio and to the Tennessee line, he canvassed the State, delivering speeches of impassioned eloquence and convincing logic. Everywhere enormous crowds greeted him with unbounded enthusiasm and people rode on horseback fifty miles across the mountains to hear him.

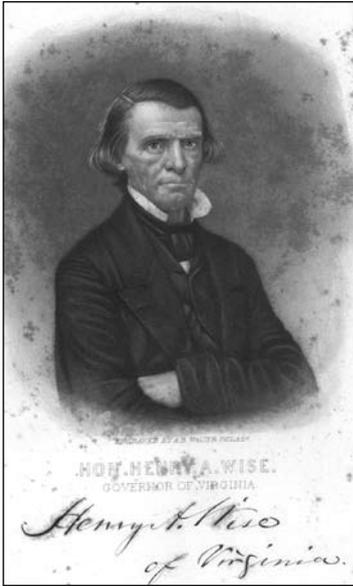
—Barton Haxall Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia*.

Know-Nothings— The Know-Nothing party originated in New York City as a secret anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic society. Members of the party proclaimed that “Americans must rule America” and by 1854 it was a national organization. Article VI of The Constitution of the United States reads: “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification for any office of public trust under this government.” The Constitution of Virginia reads: “No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatever; nor shall any man be enforced or restrained, molested or burthened in his body or goods, or otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinion or belief; but all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and the same shall in no wise affect, diminish or enlarge their civil capacities.” The Constitution of the Know-Nothing Party read: “The object of this organization shall be to resist the insidious policy of the Church of Rome, and other foreign influences against the institutions of the country, by placing in all offices in the gift of the people, or by appointment, none but native born Protestant citizens.” The Know-Nothing oath: “You furthermore promise and declare that you will not vote nor give your influence for any man for any office in the gift of the people, unless he be an American born citizen, in favor of Americans ruling America, nor if he be a Roman Catholic.” The party disbanded after 1856. Writing in his book, *Seven Decades of the Union*, Henry A. Wise described the Know-Nothing movement: “It was the most impious and unprincipled affiliation by bad means, for bad ends, which ever seized upon large masses of men of every opinion and party, and swayed them for a brief period blindly, as if by a Vehmgerichtel!”

—*Editor’s note*.

The Campaign as described by Barton Haxall Wise:

In his addresses Wise did not confine himself to the issue of Know-nothingism alone, but dwelt at length upon his favorite topics of public improvements and the industrial development of the State. Oftentimes his hearers, who came expecting to hear a political discussion solely, were entertained for hours by a dissertation upon the minerals, woods, and water-power of the State, the encouragement of manufacturers, and the need of improved transportation facilities, etc... He urged the need of a complete system of public education, such as was contemplated by Jefferson, and a State school of scientific agriculture. Virginia, he described as being ‘in the anomalous condition of an old State that has all the capacities of a new one— of a new State that has all the capacities of an old one.’ On the subject of slavery, he pointed out the steady growth of abolitionism throughout the North, and declared that the Know-nothings were abolitionists in disguise, which assertion seemed in a measure confirmed, by the large



Henry A. Wise, Governor of Virginia. Engraved by A. B. Walter, Philadelphia. Used as the frontispiece in James P. Hambleton's *Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*.



Virginia State Capitol, Richmond. Photo from *Historic Virginia Homes and Churches* by Robert A. Lancaster, Jr.

number of extremists throughout the North and New England who were prominent in the secret order. He was unsparing in his denunciation of this class, and of what he considered the encroachments upon the rights of the South...

On the 24th day of May, 1855, what had been one of the most exciting campaigns that has ever occurred in this country came to an end, and the *viva voce* of the people of Virginia was given for the Democratic standard-bearer. The total vote of the State was 156,668, of which Wise received 83,424 votes, Flournoy 73,244, being a majority of 10,180 for the former. Throughout the Northern States the result in Virginia had been watched with intense interest... The triumphant march of the secret order in America was thenceforward broken, and the 'dark lantern' had lost its attractiveness, for in addition to Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi gave their verdict against the new movement, and Know-nothingism, instead of successfully invading the South, received an overwhelming defeat...

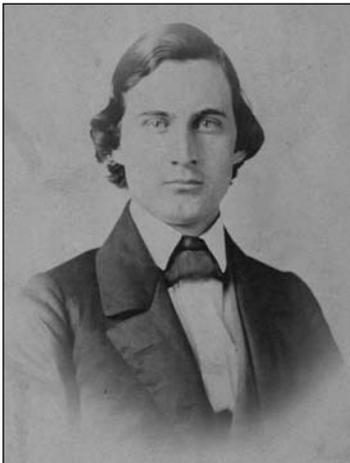
...On the 1st of January, 1856, he took the oath of office as governor, without any inaugural ceremony, and entered upon the discharge of his duties.

—Barton Haxall Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia*.

1856

On July 9, 1856 Annie Jennings Wise was married to Frederick Plumer Hobson in the Governor's Mansion in Richmond. Annie had earlier written to her brother, Obadiah, then in Paris, about the wedding. Obadiah responded:

Your letter of June 5th reached me just in time to let me know beforehand that today is your wedding day. A very bright, pleasant day it is here, and strange to say, not at all different from several other days previous; ...The whole thing mixes up all sorts of ideas and remembrances,—pleas-



Frederick Plumer Hobson, 1833–1868.

ant and unpleasant, —serious and comical, —and carried me backward and forward through all the scenes of our nineteen years' acquaintance—and it seems to me that some man whose face I am unacquainted with is about to take unto himself for a wife, —a little red-faced infant, —a little girl in short frocks, —a slender damsel of thirteen summers, —a maiden of sixteen who has begun to wear her hair and bodice like a woman, —and a full grown woman whom I think about, but have never seen, —all in a heap, —and that somehow I ought to feel a little more pathetic about the transaction than I really do.

—William M. Adkins, *Obadiah Jennings Wise '50: A Sketch of His Life*, Indiana University Alumni Quarterly, 1937–1938.

On April 22, 1857 Annie Wise Hobson gave birth to John Cannon Hobson in the Executive Mansion in Richmond, perhaps the only time that a Governor's grandson has been born in that house. Soon, Annie would move to Eastwood in Goochland County, west of Richmond. John Cannon Hobson had given Eastwood to his son Plumer Hobson, and he had given other large farms, Howard's Neck and Snowden to two other sons.

1858

Eastwood, September 23, 1858.

My dear Father— I must no longer delay thanking you for the beautiful cup you sent to *my little Henry Wise*. It is as handsome a one as I ever saw, & much handsomer than babies usually receive. May he prove himself worthy of the gift, & of the name he bears!

To me it is valuable as an evidence of my dear Father's affection, & of the honor conferred upon me *in being permitted to name a son after the Governor* of my state, & one who shall stand amongst my country's great men in the annals of her history— *who is now in my estimation her greatest man*.

You will see by my letter to Mother that Mr. Hobson is absent... He seems very cheerful. He occupies himself attending to his correspondence & reading. In the evening we take a quick game of chess together. I hope that you will bring Mother up & pay me a visit soon. —Your devotedly attached daughter, *Annie J. W. Hobson*.

Eastwood, Dec. 11th, 1858.

My dear Mother— I write an exciting day has just passed for our little household. Henry was baptized between father & me by his Uncle Henry. As I desired somewhat to honor the event I invited the neighbors to witness it. Mrs. & Mrs. Seddon & their children, Mr. & Mrs. G—, Mrs. Billing and all the young folks from Mrs. Morison's were here. I gave them all a kind of cold collation. As Tom was sick I had to exert myself considerably to have things *comme il faut* & I feel quite tired tonight. I wish that you could have witnessed with Father how Henry behaved. He was laughing & cooing all the time. When the water was put on him he laughed in his Uncle's face. Dedicating a child to God is truly a solemn duty in life. I endeavored today to take hold of all God's gracious promises with earnest faith and to send my whole heart to God in prayer from my little one.



Governor's Mansion, Photo from Historic Virginia Homes and Churches by Robert A. Lancaster, Jr.

my little Henry Wise Henry Wise Hobson, named after his grandfather Henry Alexander Wise, was born on July 9, 1858.

Uncle Henry Henry A. Wise, Jr., 1834–1869

I am greatly gratified that you all liked the sausage meat so well. I have some sauce for Father which I hope you will find equally as good as I have taken a great deal of pain with them. I'll endeavor to send you some eggs for Xmas. Not only Mr. Hobson & I regret that the children cannot come up at Xmas but all the young people in the neighborhood are disappointed that they will not be here. My Xmas will be truly dull without them. We shall have a quiet time at Eastwood. I am sure my dear Mother that you will not regret half as much as I do that I cannot take the New Year's dinner with you & Father. But that is a time that it is almost impossible on these large plantations to leave home. And then too it is such a bad season of the year to travel about with young children. Any change is so apt to give them cold. Henry and Cannon seem so well now that I want to keep them so, the whole winter. I'd not expect that we will go down again sooner than the Spring. I wish that I could have enjoyed Father's birthday with you all. God grant it that he may be spared to see many more. Ah! it is such a sad thing to me to think that you will so soon leave Richmond. I shall feel so far away from you all... I think of you very very often and never forget you in my prayers. I love you very dearly Mother. I have wanted more of late to be with you than I ever did before. Often I have thought—"if I could only enjoy one hour's talk with Mother!" A press of household cares & duties has been my cross and temptation since my return home... I have enjoyed some pleasant evenings lately reading *Boat Life on the Nile* by Prime. He writes in an easy, agreeable style & gives me a delightful idea of Boat life in Egypt... Tell Johnny and Néné that I am so poor this Xmas they must not expect a present. I have told Dick the same... I received such a kind letter from Mrs. Hobson by Richard. She is so truly good and kind to me. Having heard I still had a cold she sent me the recipe of a remedy for it, and offered to do a great deal of work for me, as she knows that Tom is sick & Maria, the cook, also. The latter has a daughter. If Dr. Deane thinks it advisable, we are at once going to send the mother Maria to the Infirmary in Richmond. Our love to all. I do hope that you are better. —Truly your attached daughter,
A. J. W. Hobson.

Tom, a butler and slave at Eastwood

"I have enjoyed some pleasant evenings lately reading *Boat Life on the Nile* by Prime"

"The bazaars of Cairo have been frequently described. The streets are a little wider where the shops abound, and are usually roofed over, admitting sunshine by windows in the matting or close roof, only at mid-day. Business hours are from about eleven to three. No shop is open longer in the principal bazaars. I have more than once found a merchant closing his shop and have been refused an article I wished to purchase... At mid-day the bazaars are crowded, jammed, with passers-by or purchasers, women with veiled [*sic*] faces, and donkeys loaded with water-skins, Turks, Bedouins, camels, dromedaries, and horses, all mingled together, for side-walk or pavement there is none, and it is therefore at the risk of constant pressure against the filthiest specimens of humanity, and constant collisions with nets of fleas and lice, that one passes through the narrow streets...

"...Here it was the Nile. No dream, no half river, no small stream of dashing water, but that great river of which we had read, thought, and dreamed; the river on which princes in long-forgotten years had floated palaces and temples from far up, down to their present abode; the river which Abraham saw, and over which Moses stretched out his arm in vengeance; where the golden barge of Cleopatra swept with perfumed

breezes, and when, but a few years later, she was dead and her magnificence gone, the feeble footsteps of the Son of God, in infancy on earth, hallowed the banks that the idolatry of thousands of years had cursed; the river of which Homer sang, and Isaiah prophesied, and in whose dark waters fell the tears of the weeping Jeremiah; the river of which all poets wrote, and philosophers taught, all learning, all science, all art spoke for centuries. The waters at our feet, murmuring dashing, brawling against the foundation of the palace, come by the stately front of Abou Simbal, had loitered before the ruins of Philæ, had dashed over the cataracts and danced in the starlight by Luxor and Karnak. From what remote glens of Africa, from what Ethiopian plains they rose, we did not now pause to think, but having looked long and earnestly up the broad reach of the river, we turned into the palace, and after pipes and coffee, the universal gift of hospitality here, we returned to our boat.

“The Nile itself, at first, sadly disappointed me. I confess to ideas of a clear and glorious river, like the swift Ohio, flowing over golden sand and shining stones. I had never paused to ask myself whence came its fertilizing powers, or whence the vast deposits of soft mud that enrich the lower part of Egypt; and when I saw the strong stream in the hot sunshine, looking more like flowing mud than water, I was unwilling to call this the Nile. Utility was not what I wanted to see in the river. Beauty, majesty, power, all these I had looked for, and there was nothing of them until the sun went down, and the moon gilded—not silvered—the stream. Then it was the river of my imagination—a strong, a mighty flood, glorious in its deep, strong flow, and the unsightly banks, which, in the day, are abrupt walls of black mud, in layers looking like huge unbaked brick, become picturesque and fairly beautiful with waving groves of sora and palms, and glistening fields of doura.”

—William C. Prime, *Boat Life in Egypt and Nubia*.

October–December 1859

☞ From *The End of an Era* by John S. Wise:

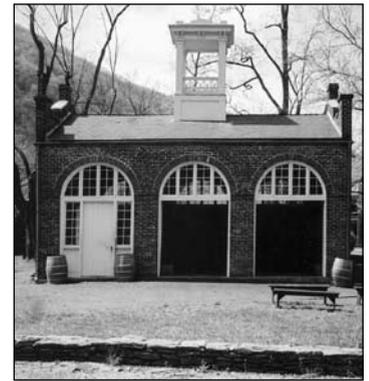
The attack of John Brown upon Harper’s Ferry came upon Virginia like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky.

In the afternoon of October 17, 1859, I [John S. Wise] was passing along Main Street in Richmond, when I observed a crowd of people gathering about the bulletin board of a newspaper. In those days, news did not travel so rapidly as now; besides which, the telegraph lines at the place from which the news came were cut.

The first report read—“*There is trouble of some sort at Harper’s Ferry. A party of workmen have seized the Government Armory.*”

Soon another message flashed: “*The men at Harper’s Ferry are not workmen. They are Kansas border ruffians, who have attacked and captured the place, fired upon and killed several unarmed citizens, and captured Colonel Washington and other prominent citizens of the neighborhood. We cannot understand their plans or ascertain their numbers.*”

By this time an immense throng had assembled, agape with wonder. Naturally reflecting that the particulars of an outbreak like this would first reach the governor, I darted homeward. I found my father in the library, roused from his afternoon siesta, in the act of reading the telegrams which he had just received. They were simply to the effect that the arsenal and government property at Harper’s Ferry were in possession of a band of rioters, without describing their character. I promptly and breathlessly told what I had



John Brown’s Fort, the armory engine house where John Brown was captured after his unsuccessful raid on the United States Armory in Harper’s Ferry, October 16, 1859. This incident, and all of the events surrounding it, contributed significantly to the disintegration of the Union and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Harper’s Ferry was then in Virginia but is now in West Virginia.

seen on the bulletin boards, and, while I was hurriedly delivering my news, other messengers arrived with telegrams to the same effect as those posted in the streets. The governor was by this time fully aroused. He was prompt in action. His first move was to seize the Virginia code, take a reference, and indite a telegram addressed to Colonel John Thomas Gibson, of Charlestown, commandant of the militia regiment within whose territory the invasion had occurred, directing him to order out, for the defense of the State, the militia under his command, and immediately report what he had done...

...I was promptly dispatched to summon the Secretary of the Commonwealth, the Adjutant-General, and the colonel and adjutant of the First Regiment...

In those days, the track ran down the centre of the street, and the depot was in the most popular portion of the city. News of the disturbance having gone abroad, it was an easy task to assemble the regiment; and, by the time appointed, all Richmond was on hand to learn the true meaning of the outbreak, and witness the departure of the troops...

The masses of the populace swarming about the soldiers presented every variety of excitement, interest, and curiosity.

As for me, my "mannishness" (there is no other word expressive of it) was such that, forgetting what an insignificant chit I was, I actually attempted to accompany the troops.

Transported by enthusiasm, I rushed home, donned a little blue jacket with brass buttons and a navy cap, selected a Virginia rifle nearly half as tall again as myself, rigged myself with a powder-horn and bullets, and, availing myself of the darkness, crept into the line of K Company. The file-closers and officers knew me, and indulged me to the extent of not interfering with me, never doubting the matter would adjust itself. Other small boys, who got a sight of me standing there, were variously affected. Some were green with envy, while others ridiculed me with pleasant suggestions concerning what would happen when father caught me.

In time the order to embark was received. I came to "attention" with the others, went through the orders, marched into the car, and took my seat. It really looked as if the plan was to succeed. Alas and alas for these hopes! One incautious utterance had thwarted all my plans. When I went home to compare myself for war, the household had been too much occupied to observe my preparations. I succeeded in donning my improvised uniform, secured my arms, and had almost reached the outer door of the basement, when I encountered Lucy, one of the slave chambermaids.

"Hi! Mars' John. Whar is you gwine?" exclaimed Lucy surprised.

"To Harper's Ferry," was the proud reply, and off I sped.

"I declar', I b'leve that boy thinks hisself a man, sho' 'nuff," said Lucy, as she glided into the house. It was not long before she told Eliza, the housekeeper, who in turn hurried to my invalid mother with the news. She summoned Jim, the butler, and sent him to father with the information.

Now Jim, the butler, was one of my natural enemies. However, the Southern man may have been master of the negro, there were compensatory processes whereby certain negroes were masters of their masters' children. Never was autocracy more absolute than that of a Virginia butler. Jim may have been father's slave, but I was Jim's minion, and felt it. There was no potentate I held in greater reverence, no tyrant whose mandates I heard in greater fear, no ogre whose grasp I should have felt with greater terror. This statement may not be fully appreciated by others, but will touch a responsive chord in the heart of every Southern-bred man who passed his youth in a household where "Uncle Charles," or "Uncle Henry," or "Uncle Washington," or uncle somebody, wielded the sceptre of

authority as family butler. Bless their old souls, dead and gone, what did they want with freedom? They owned and commanded everything and everybody that came into their little world. Even their own masters and mistresses were dependent upon them to an extent that only increased their sense of their own importance. What Southern boy will ever forget the terrors of that frown which met him at the front door and scanned his muddy foot-marks on the marble steps? What roar was every more terrible—what grasp more icy or relentless—than those of his father’s butler surprising him in the cake-box or the preserve-jar? What criminal, dragged to justice, ever appeared before the court more thoroughly cowed into subjection than the Southern boy led before the head of the house in the strong grip of that domestic despot?

“What!” exclaimed the governor, on hearing Jim’s report of my escapade, “is that young rascal really trying to go? Hunt him up, Jim! Capture him! Take away his arms, and march him home in front of you!” Laughing heartily, he resumed his work, well knowing that Jim understood his orders and would execute them.

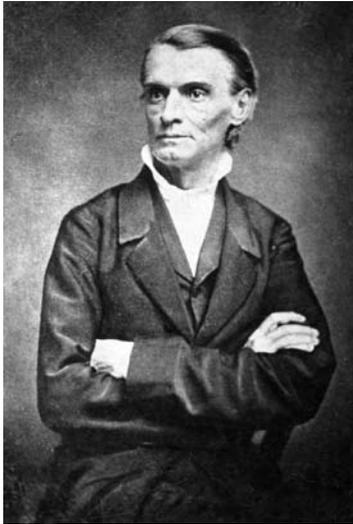
Think of such authority given to a negro, just when John Brown was turning the heads of the slaves with ideas of their own importance! Is it not monstrous? I was sitting in a car, enjoying the sense of being my country’s defender starting for the wars, when I recognized a well-known voice in the adjoining car, inquiring, “Gentlemen, is any ov you seed anythin’ ov de Gov’ner’s little boy about here? I’m a-lookin’ fur him under orders to take him home.”

I shoved my long squirrel-rifle under the seats and followed it, amid the laughter of those about me. I heard the dread footsteps approach, and the inquiry repeated. No voice responded; but, by the silence and the tittering, I knew I was betrayed. A great, shiny black face, with immense whites to the eyes, peeped almost into my own, and, with a broad grin, said, “Well, I declar’! Here you is as las’! Cum out, Mars’ John.” But John did not come. Jim, after coaxing a little, seized a leg, and, as he drew me forth, clinging to my long rifle, he exclaimed, “Well, ’fore de Lord! How much gun has dat boy got, anyhow?” and the soldiers went wild with laughter.

In full possession of the gun, and pushing me before him, Jim marched his prisoner home. Once or twice I made a show of resistance, but it was in vain. “Here, you boy! You better mind how you cut yo’ shins. You must er lost you’ senses. Yo’ father told me to take you home. I gwine to do it, too, you understand? Ef you don’t mind, I’ll take you straight to him, and you know and I know dat if I do, he’ll tare you up alive fur botherin’ him with you’ foolishness, busy ez he is.” I realized that it was even so, and, sadly crestfallen, was delivered into my mother’s chamber, where, after a lecture upon the folly of my course, I was kept until the Harper’s Ferry expedition was fairly on its way...

John Brown was tried for treason, murder, and inciting slaves to insurrection. His trial occupied six days. He was defended by able counsel, of his own selection, from Massachusetts and Ohio. Every witness he desired summoned appeared. The evidence of his guilt was overwhelming, and he was sentenced to death. Any other penalty would have been a travesty of justice, and a confession that the organized governments which he assailed were mockeries, affording no protection to their citizens against midnight murder and assassination. Did the Virginians exult over the wretched victim of his own lawlessness? NO!

The *New York Herald* published the account of how that verdict was received: “Not the slightest sound was heard in the vast crowd, as this verdict was returned and read; not the slightest expression of elation or triumph was uttered from the hundreds present... Nor was this strange silence interrupted during the whole of the time occupied by the forms of the court.”



Henry A. Wise. Courtesy of the Valentine Richmond History Center, Richmond, Virginia.

...The Virginians took the life of John Brown to preserve their own lives, and the lives of their wives and children, from destruction. He had, indeed, “whetted knives of butchery” for them, and had come a thousand miles to kill people who had never heard his name...

...To one who knows the truth, the most tantalizing reflections upon the John Brown raid are these: The man who, as colonel in the army of the United States, captured Brown; the governor of Virginia, under whose administration he was justly hung; ay, a majority of the people of Virginia— were at heart opposed to slavery. Uninterrupted by madmen like Brown, they would have accomplished, in good time, the emancipation of the slave without the awful fratricidal scenes which he precipitated. Of course there are those who will still deny this, and conclusive proof is impossible. History took its course... Neither Colonel Lee nor the governor of Virginia were champions of slavery. Both rejoiced at its final overthrow...

When Virginia had performed her duty in executing Brown, her next step was to inquire what sympathy she received in the hour of her trial. She expected, as she had a right to expect, that the North, boasting of its superior civilization and its greater regard for the maintenance of the laws protecting person and property, would be practically unanimous in condemnation...

When it was learned that, in many parts of the North, churches held services of humiliation and prayer; that bells were tolled; that minute-guns were fired; that Brown was glorified as a saint; that even in the legislature of Massachusetts, eight out of nineteen senators had voted to adjourn at the time of his execution; that Christian ministers had been parties to his schemes of assassination and robbery; that women had canonized the bloodthirsty old lunatic as “St. John the Just;” that philanthropists had pronounced him “most truly Christian;” that Northern poets like Whittier and Emerson and Longfellow were writing panegyrics upon him; that Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison approved his life, and counted him a martyr, —then Virginians began to feel that an “irrepressible conflict” was indeed upon them...

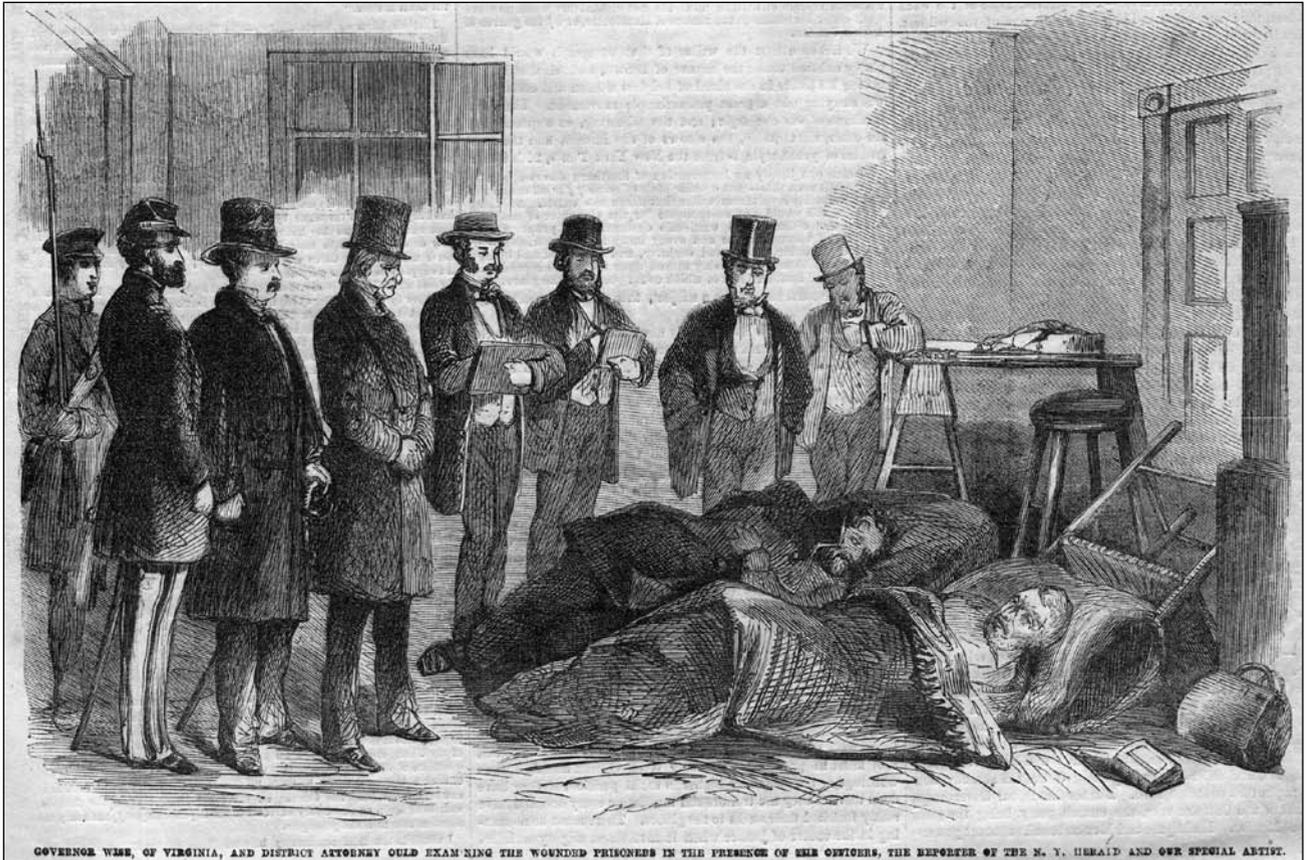
...When the troops came back from Harper’s Ferry, they were amply supplied with songs. The first and most popular was one upon John Brown, sung to the tune of *The Happy Land of Canaan*. It had a number of verses, only one of which I remember, running something after this fashion:—

“In Harper’s Ferry section, there was an insurrection,
John Brown thought the niggers would sustain him,
But old master Governor Wise
Put his specs upon his eyes,
And he landed in the happy land of Canaan.

REFRAIN

“Oh me! Oh my! The Southern boys are a-trainin’,
We’ll take a piece of rope
And march ’em up a slope,
And land ’em in the happy land of Canaan.”

It is surprising how popular this rigmarole became through the South, and many a time during the war I heard the regiments, as they marched, sing verses from it. It is in contrast with the solemn swell of *John Brown’s Body*, as rendered by the Union troops. The latter is only an adaptation of a favorite camp-meeting hymn which I often heard the negroes sing, as they worked in the fields, long before the days of John Brown. The old words were:



“THE INSURRECTION AT HARPER’S FERRY, VA. — Governor Wise, of Virginia, and District Attorney Ould Examining the Wounded Prisoners in the Presence of the Officers, the Reporter of the N. Y. Herald and our own Special Artist.” John Brown is on the floor at right, being interrogated a few hours after his capture. Known to have been present when Brown was questioned were: Virginia Governor Henry A. Wise, Colonel Robert E. Lee, Virginia Senator James M. Mason, Ohio Congressman Clement Vallandigham, District of Columbia District Attorney Robert Ould, and a reporter from the New York Herald. In this illustration from Frank Leslie’s Illustrated News, October 29, 1859, Wise is probably fourth from left. Robert E. Lee, known to have been there in civilian clothes is probably third from left, with his sword. One of Brown’s supporters wrote of the meeting: “In contrast with so many Northern journalists, and to some extent with Vallandigham, the two Virginians (Wise and Mason) proved themselves perfect gentlemen on this occasion.” Photo courtesy of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

“My poor body lies a-mouldering in the clay,
 My poor body lies a-mouldering in the clay,
 My poor body lies a-mouldering in the clay,
 While my soul goes marching on.

REFRAIN

“Glory, glory, hallelujah,
 Glory, glory, hallelujah,
 Glory, glory, hallelujah,
 As my soul goes marching on.”



Henry A Wise's term as Governor of Virginia ended on January 1, 1860.

1860

my little daughter Annie Wise Hobson, born March 4, 1860, at Eastwood.

asafaetida gum resin, of various oriental plants of the carrot family, formerly used in medicine.

Eastwood, March 29, 1860.

Many thanks my own beloved Father for your sweet blessing upon myself and my little daughter. This morning's mail brought it to me. Ever since the birth of the little one I have desired to write and tell you about it, but of course could not use my eyes.

One of the first desires I expressed after its birth was, "Oh! If I could only show it to Father," and every day since I have wished the same thing. You have doubtless heard that her Father named it after me. I am very proud of *my little Annie Wise* for she really is an *uncommon baby*. She weighed at least twelve pounds at her birth and grows finely. She is by far the largest & healthiest baby I have had. She has my brown eyes & nose exactly with very dark hair. Her mouth is like Cannon's & everyone noticed the strong likeness between them. Her head is very large, & her shoulders very broad. She does nothing but eat & sleep. Thank God, after some days of trying sickness I have been doing wonderfully well & I gain strength as rapidly as I could expect. My nervous system was sadly out of sorts and had it not been for *asafaetida*, I should have been very ill, if not have died. May it please God to answer your prayer my dear Father, that I may have a grace given me to bring up my children for an eternity in Heaven. May I be as conscientious in the discharge of my duty towards them as my Father has been towards me. And I must add, may my daughter prove "more faithful and true" to us than I have been towards my beloved parent, for well do I know that I have often failed & been wanting in dutifulness.

The little one is waking & is as usual ravenously hungry. Cannon & Henry are well & hearty. Cannon prays to God every day "please bring my Grandpa back." I wish that I could run down & help you in your *lonely home*. Mr. H— & I join in love. —Your devoted daughter, *A.J.W.H.*
P.S. Excuse such a poor letter, for my hands are unsteady & eyes weak.