
224 11/6/1850 *From:* Otis [O. O. Howard] *To:* Mother [Eliza Gilmore]

OOH-0216

West Point N.Y.

Source: Bowdoin

West Point N.Y. Nov 6th 1850

Dear Mother

I received your letter this morning and as I now have a few moments to myself I will spend them in answering it. You know that I promised to write to quite a number; & as I have but little time at the most, you must not expect that I shall be quite so punctual in writing to you as I would like to be. But you may be assured that there will not many weeks pass at any one time without my writing.

I am now doing very well in all respects. The face of things has remarkably changed since I first came here. When one enters a military Institution every thing at first must seem new & strange; but in a very short time all those things which at first appeared so severe & unnatural become habitual & easy. It is almost as easy for me to march now as it was formerly to walk alone. I have but very little time for giving way to gloom & low spirits. There is much excitement & rivalry in the class, as there must necessarily be, where high standing is of so much importance. I have now fairly embarked. I partake of the excitement & rivalry and keep on studying.

I am sorry to hear such news from Warren's mother & brother, and hope that with regard to Elias it may not be true. Warren Lothrop was in N. York when Arza was there & saw him there sick. I hope he will get better now he has got home. Rowland wrote me about his visit into Portland. I am glad he has got acquainted with Lizzie for it will be pleasant for him to visit there now & then while he is at Yarmouth & also at Brunswick. It will also afford her pleasure to have him come.

I wrote to Lizzie that she must make you a visit as soon as she can. She wrote me in her last letter that she wished to write to you, but was afraid to do so. Perhaps you can imagine why she is so diffident. If you can find time I should like to have you write her a few lines and she will answer you. Then the ice will be broken, and she will enjoy writing to you.

Your picture of the little boys churning pleased me. I like to have you tell me of such little things transpiring around you. Such little pictures of home scenes always quicken the fancy & the memory, and make one think for a time that he is at home & in the midst of the happy circle.

I could hardly tell you what I eat, but I am sure that we have a plenty of bread, dry bread & butter. Soup comes at dinner once or twice a week. Tough beef on other days. We never have the least luxury except molasses to eat on our bread, once or twice a day & a sweet potato about once a month. No pies, cakes, puddings &c. Notwithstanding our "ordinary fare", I never had such an appetite before. If I would permit myself I believe I should "eat every thing all up", but as I know that "eating too much" is not congenial with hard study, I am obliged to be a little abstemious. The Battalion drills have ceased for this fall & will not be again resumed till next spring. We now have, every evening at half past four or five o'clock, a dress parade. I like these parades first rate now. We have such splendid music and the appearance of the Battalion is so grand. It will not, however, be quite so interesting when the weather gets to be a little cooler, to be obliged to stand out there with our fingers & ears freezing. But I came from a cold country and therefore should not cry for cold.

I do not see Warren very often, not oftener than once in a fortnight. If he was a commissioned officer, he could visit me any time. I hope if he remains in the army that he will get a commission. Whatever a man's talents may be, if he is an enlisted man, his associates must be confined to enlisted men. He does not enjoy the attention & respect he deserves. He is almost absolutely under the control of every & any commissioned officer & to such he must bow the knee & do his bidding. It is different with a low commissioned officer. He enjoys more respect & receives more attention whether he deserves it or not & is so far independent that he can resign when he pleases & never can be degraded into a common soldier. I almost envied Warren's position, when I first came here, but I begin to see the disadvantages of his situation. His present liberty arises from his good luck in having a fine man to command the Company. Warren is a fine fellow & has much <pennetration> & information. He will make a splendid officer if he is advanced.

Give my love to one & all of the family. And write me as often as you can. I don't think it worth the trouble for

you to make me any drilling pants. We are obliged to have them fit perfectly. They are purely white. I ought to have known about my shirts before I got them made. A linnen bosom is worse than useless. The uniform coat buttons up close to the throat, & instead of a collar a binding is attached over which we turn the linnen collar. All my good bosom shirts, I will exchange for plain shirts when you come, if you think it best. I don't know how good my shirts will be at a year from this time.

There are a good many little conveniences of which I am now deprived, which you can bring me. I shall mention them now & then in my letters. I count every thing upon your making me a visit next June & especially upon Lizzie's accompanying you.

I should judge from your letter that you had not then received my last in which I gave you a short description of my visit to Peekskill. I began this letter yesterday (Wednesday). The air is more chilling to day. Everything seems to look gloomy & solitary about West Point. The mountains look bare & cheerless, and the forrests that surround us, but a short time ago, so green & flourishing, have put on their winter dress.

My birthday comes tomorrow my twentieth birthday! This period of life is said to be the happiest. Well! Perhaps it is so! But I presume the principal was not drawn from the experience of Cadets. I do not now look forward to the future with any fixed determination. Every thing with me rests on probabilities & conditions. I may resign at the end of two years. I may graduate & then resign, or I may stay in the army. If I should by any chance fall short of the 5th stand in my class, I shall most certainly resign, unless my opinion changes. I find, however, that it is doing me great good in many points of view to recite in the manner we are obliged to do. It will not be time lost even if I do not become an officer.

My pages are filled so good bye. Your affectionate son. Otis.

225 11/10/1850 *From:* O. O. Howard

To: Mother [Eliza Gilmore]

OOH-0217

West Point N.Y.

Source: Bowdoin

West Point N.Y. Nov 10th 1850.

Dear Mother

It is but a few days since I wrote to you. But as Frances Lothrop is here & on his way home and would like to carry a letter from me to you, I thought I would scribble you a few lines. Francis looks natural, but he seems to me much changed. He looks almost worn out. Francis will give you some idea of things here. He thinks I have not changed much since he left, not so much as his brother. Every thing with me is about the same as usual. The round of duty follows day after day. In fact, there is very little variety in any thing except in our studies. The excitement of study & the strife for high standing keep us alive. Francis will have much to tell you about Roland, for he has been with him all summer. He says Roland has not overcome that gloomy disposition of his, but will often sit & sing or whistle to himself some mournful song, as he used to do. I shall be glad to see Roland back.

Laura Howard wrote me a letter, which I received at the same I received your last letter. She said that Franklin Lane was to be married the day his lady died. I should think the circumstances would have made her death doubly sad. I was not surprised to hear of Marilla's death, for I did not think she would live long. But it is sad for me to see the companions, the play mates of my childhood drop away one after another. How rejoiced Mrs Lothrop must be to meet her son after so long a separation, and his wife too, whom he left so young & so soon after his marriage. The length of time is not so bad, as the anxiety & the uncertainty that his situation has given rise to. But he is now safely back. It is true, with no more than half the energy, vigor & enterprise he carried away, but with experience & perhaps with money. Time will repair all the injury done to his health & spirits. I wish I could go with him from West Point but it is folly to wish, especially to make a futile wish. I got permission yesterday afternoon & evening to visit Francis. He & Warren came up to my room towards evening & stopped till after Parade. Has Sarah & Mr Sargent made you a visit yet. When he has been to see you, you must tell me how you like his appearance.

Give my love to all the family. Tell Dr. Lord that he must visit me on his way to Philadelphia if he can make it convenient. Give my best regards to him & all my friends, whom you may meet at Leeds. It is now Sabbath morning, and a beautiful morning it is too. I presume you are all preparing to go to church. Laura said that Mr Barrows was to teach the school that I did last winter. It seems as though I should like to teach that school this coming winter, if by so doing I could be in Leeds.

I have not written to Uncle John yet. If you see him give him my best respects & tell him I am doing very well here. Is Maria at Gorham now? And where is William? Let me see, Rowland's vacation will come before a great while and I reckon he will enjoy a visit home. I can recollect how pleasant vacations were to me when at Yarmouth. I should enjoy this place much better if we could have a vacation once in 6 months or at least once a year. But it is as well to make the best of our circumstances, whatever they may be. I have voluntarily put myself here & hence denied myself many privileges, but it was all for some purpose, and that purpose is as clear now as it was when I decided upon coming. It was not particularly to learn the military art, but especially for the sake of mental discipline. And I know that there is no other place in the wide world where I should or could apply my mind as I am here, in a measure forced to do. For here, punishment is the worst of disgrace immediately follows neglect of duty, and true merit is some of its reward.

I have just returned from Church. We had a very good sermon, suggested, our Chaplain said by a visit from him to a young man in the Hospital. This young man's name is Polk. The Cadets of his acquaintance say that he is very low, sick. Write me what you know of my father's relatives (excepting Uncle Ward's family), who reside in N. York. Remember me to Arza. Tell him I should like to be with him while he is sick. I suppose he is with you. Remember me again to all.

In much haste from your Affectionate son
O. O. Howard

226 11/23/1850 *From:* Oliver O. Howard

To: Mother [Eliza Gilmore]

OOH-0218

West Point N.Y.

Source: Bowdoin

West Point N.Y. Nov 23d 1850

Dear Mother

I have taken out my portfolio & placed my paper upon it without having any definite idea of what I am to write. Always when I have a little leisure I think I must spend it in writing letters. This employment constitutes my recreation. I believe that I have grown old since I have got to be a soldier - if not in looks. I seem to myself to be as much as five years older than when I left home in my feelings; that is, I am seldom so boyish, light hearted & joyous. One of my chief enjoyments is receiving letters from my mother & my old friends. These sources of pleasure seem to have failed me of late. Day after day I go to the Post Office, but some way or other, nobody takes pains to write & I am bound to come away disappointed.

I think, I have never said any thing in my letters of my room & room-mates. My room is situated in what are called the Old Barracks, in the third story. It is about as large as two of our College rooms & twice as old & "untidy". Four of us room together. Each has his furniture - a little iron bedstead placed in a particular position just wide enough for one, a trunk & a chair. As I sit now with my back to the fire, when I raise my eyes I see Brown, L, Treadwell, Howard, Lazelle printed in large Roman Letters & stuck upon the wall over the heads of the beds. The beds are folded, first the mattress is turned up, leaving half of the bedstead bare. Then the rest of the bed is folded and aranged at the head as neatly as possible. Between the names & beds is a row of pins, upon which our caps & clothes must be hung. At the head of the bed the trunk must be kept under the foot the shoes. Opposite the door is the gun rack, in which there are just four places fitted each for a gun, over which there are four wooden pins to hang our belts & side arms upon. We have between us four, two tables which are made of the best of iron, 1 wash stand and one pail. We have also two lamps & a broom. Every thing as I have told you has its place, and if any thing is out of place the inspecting officer will detect it immediately. We have a grate in the fire-place in which is burned coal ("sea coal" or anthracite). None of us are allowed to touch the fire, & in fact there is no need of it. For a man comes in every morning at ½ past four o'clock, & puts on a supply of coal & keeps the fire well supplied all day.

My room mates are all from New England. Mr Browne from Maine, Mr Treadwell from New Hampshire & Lazelle from Massachusetts. Mr Browne is a queer genius. He is large & fine looking & has much of the yankee persevera. He studies about all the time night & day. We are obliged to go to bed at 10. But he frequently gets up again about half past 10, and studies till one, or two o'clock. He now stands in the third section, but fears that he shall fall. He is one of those who came here with a common education & common ability. With his ambition & iron constitution I think he will be able to master the course, though he gets rather a low mark now. Mr Treadwell is a fine young man & a smart scholar. He stands in the second section in Mathematics & in the first in Rhetoric. Lazelle I don't like over much. He "bores" me a great deal for assistance, and doesn't appear sufficiently grateful. He stands in the 4th section in both studies. He does not seem to me to be very good hearted & his habits & manners I don't like. None of my room-mates use tobacco. By the way, I have not made use of tobacco in any shape since I have been on the Point, & I have now been here three months. I think I am entirely cured.

Henry Clay's grandson is in my Class. He is a queer boy & a very smart scholar. One of my most intimate friends of my Class is a Mr Abbot of Boston. He is a little ahead of me in Mathematics & very little behind me in Ethics, i.e. in marks. He is now called the first scholar in the Class. He is of so good a disposition & always so gentlemanly & kind that none would envy him his place, were he to stand at the head of his class. If I cannot do it myself, I hope he will be the one. He told me the other evening that he was intimately acquainted with Mr Charles Vaughan's family, that moved from Hallowell, now in Cambridge.

Professor Sprule, the Chaplain, very unexpectedly sent me an invitation, last week, to visit him on the Saturday evening following. After getting permission to visit I went with two other young men, took tea, & spent a very pleasant evening indeed. One of those who accompanied me had brought letters of introduction, and the other had been on the Point over a year. So my invitation appeared to be quite complementary either to my looks, my talents, or my moral character. I hardly know which.

I shall be glad when the January examination is over. This is an examination upon which every thing depends. You might think that I had passed such ordeals often enough to take them coolly by this time. So I have, but instead of growing cool, I become every day more excitable. I cannot make so clear & good a recitation as I used to do in college.

I shall expect to have a letter from you very soon. If any are unwell you must let me know it. You must tell me what Francis Lothrop had to tell. I did not see him to talk with him so much as I could have wished. I have not seen his brother for more than a week, but shall go to see him tomorrow (Saturday) if I can. Give my love to all the family. Write me as soon as you can.

Yr affectionate Son
Oliver O. Howard

227 11/23/1850 *From:* W. B. Howard

To: Nephew [O. O. Howard]

OOH-0219

Peekskill

Source: Bowdoin

Peekskill 23 Nov 1850

My Dear Nephew

I met Mr Rundle at Cold Spring & came down with him in the Cars. I am sorry you could not have accompanied him.

I have the pleasure to inform you that my family are in good health excepting Augustus who is much the same. I will in due time address a letter to either you or to Capt [Henry] Brewerton [Superintendent of West Point, 1845-1852] requesting leave of absence to visit us at Christmas. And you must not fail in availing yourself of it. I hear nothing from the Eastward. They seldom if ever write.

Mrs Henry, my daughter residing at Hudson, made us a visit the last fortnight. She expressed a strong desire to see you & may possibly be here at Christmas.

Accept our kindest regards and best wishes for your health &c &c.

W. B. Howard