



[William Crosfield Letters](#)

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Natural Bridge Virginia

Monday September 24/59

My dearest Mamma

Five days seems a long time to intervene between my writing and this letter commencing its watery voyage but tomorrow I start on a long journey across the country to Cincinnati almost entirely by stage 200 miles, some people say even more, and at the rate of four miles an hour that is a long journey; but it is through a fine piece of country, else I should go round by cars to Washington. Where travellers are at a very great disadvantage for no one knows anything beyond the immediate locality and if you are on the look out for pretty places you must go on till you find one and then stop for no one will tell you of them before hand. I do not know when I shall get to Railroads again and your letters per Arabia at Cincinnati.

I think that I left off last in the middle of that wickedly wet day at Washington. After looking awhile at what hope will some time be the monument to Gen Washington I walked down Pennsylvania Avenue on the right near the river stands the one finished public building in the city this is a red sandstone

building in Roman style and
amidst all the marble and white
stone looks very comfortable. It
was founded by James Smithson
whose address seems to have been
of England, and intended for a
literary institution. I called at
the hotel as I passed to get some
notion of how the city lay for I
had got completely confused
that waste wilderness. After I
found my way to the Capitol
dome is quite incomplete but if
it ever arrives at the proposed
height it will be a fine work.
It is mounted by a colossal figure
of "Freedom". The building itself
stands on high ground and is
reached by a sloping walk and
flights of steps. I entered at the end
of the building under "just where the
dome ought to be" this is a circular
hall with several portraits and ten
historical pictures by American artists
passing through to the other side
are again flights of steps with statues
on either side, leading to the Capitol
Grounds somewhat park like. The
two wings are occupied by the Chamber
of Representatives & the Senate respec-
tively. The old halls where these august
assemblies used to meet are used as
it seemed to me for lumber rooms
new ones will when they are fixed be
very handsome if they have any fancy
it is that they are too much ornate

but this was more striking when I
saw them than it will be when they
are ready for their regular occupants.
When then the ceilings & galleries
were completed and covered with
all their richness of bricklayers
arranging the heating apparatus
they called it but I suspected that it
was for something else which carries
hot air through sundry gratings in
the floor there being one to each
member. Marble halls are the retiring
rooms for these legislators who I hope
will leave not to spit when they come
back to their work. I could scarcely
move about the various rooms, they
were one of the workmen, plasterers
who are renovating the unfinished
building. The same had abated when
I found myself at a short distance
above the roof the present extremity
of the work, but from here I saw quite
enough of the dismal prospect. The
original object of the great general
was to have all the streets radiating
from the Capitol (I should say avenues
for of course there would be cross streets
at stated distances) As it now
exists the whole or nearly the whole
city lies between the Capitol and
White House the intended avenues
exist marked by grass greenery
than the surrounding and here
and there a house. Immediately
round the Capitol the scene reminded

one more of brick fields than of by the cute Quaker who showed us
 anything else. None of the streets much greater foresight in his
 except the central avenue are plan, the latter has I believe been
 and on this day were as yet strictly adhered to.
 in mind. I made my way later. Rain continued till we arrived
 the Post Office a some time fine by cars at Gordonsville. Snow felt
 structure and the Patent Office thoroughly in for slavery the cars
 like all the rest still unfinished were rougher and the company
 the latter will be a very large and was of that class that we so often
 common place and it was picture sitting with their heads
 take a long time for even when low and knotted legs high above
 invention to fill it with models their heads. A very large proportion
 I did not get there till after noon of the country was under water the
 and so could not see the vast rivers finding their own limits too
 of nations kept in its rooms. I saw a narrow and mature having given
 at 1 o'clock on Thursday. Let of them so large a share of impatience
 for the steamer to take me seven miles down the river to Alexandria. They had overflowed their banks and
 the car had not ~~started~~ ^{appeared} when the very many instances in prompt
 the hotel but soon his approach ^{led} a passage down the high way
 recalled by a glorious rainbow and I guess paid no toll. Childs
 one and resting on the waters of where Indian corn should have
 the Potomac the other falling close stood seven feet high if not a mass
 to the White House and then the of water was waste of muddy clay
 seen himself "break from under" with the crops lying flat on the ground
 and just touched the opposite bank and too often an interruption of
 of the river bathing the woods and logs and tree branches. One crop
 occasional country seats with a was new to me "the weed" it is quite
 flood of light, but soon this was the prettiest place that I ever saw
 away and rain came on again a field with its large broad deep
 and left still a gloomy impression green leaves seldom rising above
 on my mind. I could not help but 18 inches from the ground, and
 contrasting this failure of one now amongst the wild flowers
 who could so well march and I was pleased to find the Virginian
 with that city I had just left plain cripples at home, some times I

saw it climbing snake like up
the telegraph posts with air occa-
sionally turned red. Never till now did
I see blacks I have seen darker
England "coal black" as black as
boot" here their blackness is of a more
intense character in many cases
it is not of the shiny kind but
more the dull blackness of charcoal
The poor fellows would stop at their
work and watch us as we passed. In
perhaps the smoke as it issued from
the chimney of our horse into the
air and going where it pleased. One
of the passengers was I thought an
old friend - an old man with white
hair and on his arm were his two
saddle bags - I thought at once of
Father Morris, who must have wand-
ered from his New England home.
All the people have their saddle bags
for it is a very extensive horse-travelling
country. Then we had passed on a
further we were stopped by what was
called "a freight off the track" the engine
of a goods train had missed its way; it
would have been equally a freight if
it had been a waggon instead of a train.
This delayed us two hours but it did
not "count much" for the engine was
about half a mile further was broken
through & we could not get on before
it was mended. The rain came in
the other way was six hours out of
time so we had comfort. Many narrow
creeks which had to be passed with
great caution delayed us still more

so that it was five o'clock before we got
to Stratton. The end of my journey.
Here I wanted a buggy to go over 17 miles
to Meers cave, but again the roads stopped
me, and I was compelled to stay all night
at a poor inn in that little town. I was
amused but my experience has taught
me, and continually proved this rule to
be the best in cases of travelling. "Put it
off till tomorrow." At six o'clock next
day I was off and such roads I never
saw in my life the character was varied
but always bad. Sometimes such as
in England only lead into a briar field,
the soil was rich clay to help the clay
again for yards and yards thick and
duck ponds (decent for paddling ducks) and
another was in passing through the woods,
the trees had just been cut within two
feet of the ground and the stumps
left, through these we had to find our way
and keep our seats. One experience I shall
not soon forget - a proof of my rule - we
were fording a river by what my little
driver was in the habit of using for the
road when the fore wheel of the buggy
went deep down - the water had washed
a hole in the middle of the stream.
My driving boy Sam was for jumping
off and leaving me to drive over; he had
got scared and let his whip about down
the river. Fortunately I had left my trunk
at Stratton or I do not think we
could have got out. We slowed my bag
and desk which got rather wet in a
cart which was following and standing
on the seat I took the lines and drove
on. You may guess we looked with
some interest at the water as it flooded
the gig and flowed within 2 inches
of our feet. I assure you I was thankful

that I did not come on the night before. In four hours and a half we had done the 17 miles and were at the cave. This I cannot describe for its beauties are so peculiar, so vast and so various that it is beyond my power. The entrance is rather low and descends rapidly, when at the bottom we are in what we have named "the skin room" here the stalactites hang from the roof just as skins do in a tannery yard, or the gypsum here is not so hard but the and broad there is in fact nothing it resembles more than skins. One of the most exquisite likenesses is a "brides veil and comb" a mass of white gypsum in the shape of a bearded head from which depends a mass of snowy whiteness more than a yard long the whole sparsules with countless crystals: another is "the elephant's head" this is not quite white but a light colour, the representation is perfect to the end of the trunk whilst over the eyes is what seems a cloth with a pattern of the same dull frosted material. Two is an occasional gem to set off the rich caparison. Near to this is an object "the angel's wing" perfect in form agreeing with my imagination I could look so soft at a little distance that I could imagine that when touched it would fall as from the wing of a butterfly. The shell room is near by where are a mass of glittering stalactites there are a ~~few~~ larger shaped like the conch and large mother of pearl shells. A natural bridge spans one of the larger halls and for beauty and richness exceeds its neighbour here. The largest hall is 275 feet long as we entered I began to think if any

had come in with us for there in the centre was standing a man most assuredly, as we approached the illusion vanished and it became merely a ~~fact~~ ^{fact}. This is Washington's Hall. There is a Ball Room and other places of sudden interest. The Garden of Eden contains a number of pillars the junction of stalactites and stalagmites sustaining or seemingly to sustain the roof; some of these pillars seem to be of the most massive kind with deep flutings running some times up at others spirally round, a closer glance however shows that these flutings are carried through and that the pillars are merely groups of stalactites such as we saw in the skin room. These are I should say the characteristic of the cave. In our room there is a column about five feet high marked both up and in circles and looks like the stump of a palm tree. In ~~the~~ ^{another} room there are masses attached from the wall by about the space of a foot which passing from floor to roof and being convex and in both, look like masses of boiler plates reared up against the wall and when struck they give just such a sound as those iron masses would do. The simile is rather common place but the cave is by no means ^{of the} ~~every~~ ^{every} day kind as our thoroughbred yard and at arm's length with a farmer's war room would be there are only the forms by which I would, if I could help to raise your minds to a little of the poetry of this wondrous region. Oh that I could bring back one tithe of those glories that I see almost daily! I started early to be back before dark, coming back we met "two solitary horsemen riding down the slope of a hill on the outskirts of a forest just as the last rays of the sun

were falling in the west." These two men
were so much in character that I think
I must try to describe them; they were on
stout horses seeming equal to any
work; behind their old-fashioned saddles
swung their constant companion
saddle bags, in front sheepskin holsters.
The men themselves were round faced
and very close shaved; their hair long
flowing behind their ears till ^{it reached} ~~it~~ their
shoulders; they wore broad brimmed
low crowned hats and in general an
unmixed air of puritans who in this
new world might have assumed the
novelties of dress. We got back to ~~Stanton~~
Lynchburg on Saturday morning
I wrote to you and afterwards came
here by stage a journey of 50 miles thru
the lovely Valley of Virginia. Oh those
hills of the Blue Ridge how I wish that
you could see them as I saw them last
night when at sunset not so far off
as to be "clothed in purple mystery" but
lying in dull undulations in the haze
as if resting after a day of hard labour
or now as I see them over the tops of
the trees the sun has just broken out
and scattered a dense mountain mist
and the dark oak leaves still wet
glitter as the morning breeze just throes
them to reflect the silvery light. I must
finish for the present for tho I should
like to say something of the beautiful
Natural Bridge which I have longed for
such a length of time to see but I must
leave it for I have no room. Please
give long loves to a list of people whose
names I leave you to supply for if I
wrote them they would cause another
postage my directions for your guidance
are "everyone". Remain
your very affectionate son
Wm Rossfield