The Image of the Vacant Chair: Soldier and Family Connections in the First World War

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THE IMAGE OF THE VACANT CHAIR:
SOLDIER AND FAMILY CONNECTIONS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
Constance Wallace
May 2016

Accepted by:
Alan Grubb, Committee Chair
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ABSTRACT

How does the image of a vacant chair and nineteenth century anxiety about the family play out in the writing of letters during the First World War? The purpose of this thesis is to explore the role of letters as a possible symbolic representation of the individual soldier and to answer questions regarding how this representation paralleled the history of family dynamics during the nineteenth century and into the first part of the twentieth century. Reid Mitchell’s book, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home*, is cornerstone to the argument of this thesis. His text helps to visualize the image of an empty chair within the domestic sphere during war. It is Mitchell’s book that establishes the framework of an issue that existed in the nineteenth century, which he mentions briefly - the family in crisis. In directing conversation towards perceived problems which the family, in both England and America, faced leading up to the First World War, it becomes evident that society viewed industrialization and urbanization as threats to this basic element of community. The eruption of the war only strengthen the fear that the integrity of family would be beyond repair if connections between the soldier and his home were not maintained.

Several groups, like the Red Cross and the Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.), recognized that the stability of those on the home front depended upon filling the ‘vacant chair’ with an appropriate substitution in family connection during the war and vice versa. Letters became a symbolic representation, or material replacement, of the individual no longer in the home. Reforms such as Britain’s passage of the Penny Post, and in America the revisions to legal domestic relations, such as marriage contracts
and new moral codes provide examples of responses that rose in reaction to the issues surrounding the family during the nineteenth century. In addition, the involvement of the Y.M.C.A. and the Red Cross during war supported the practice of writing letters home by assisting and encouraging letter writing to the soldiers. These social groups helped to strengthen this bond between soldier and family by offering letterhead and envelopes. With the help of digital analysis of word patterns and trends of actual unpublished letter collections of soldiers from the First World War, the vital connection between soldier and home is placed in context of the anxiety of keeping family connected.
DEDICATION

I would like to thank my family and friends who have supported me in discovering my inner historian, particularly my children, Christian, Calle, and Kelsey who understood my desire to reinvent myself after they left home. Without the love and encouragement of all, especially from Kevin Henderson, this journey would not have been possible.
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INTRODUCTION

When soldiers go to war, they leave behind a vacancy in the domestic space. Families feel fractured and incomplete. Soldiers feel isolated and lonesome. During the First World War, the fracture in families became deeper as men left to fight in a war of undetermined length in another country, far from the support mechanisms of family and community. It is not surprising that social agencies soon emerged to keep communication open between the soldier and his home. Letters, while not an original form of communication at this time, developed as a new and important role in the life of a soldier. Their pages became symbolic of the person writing on them. The words and ink were some comfort to family as a representation of the soldier who left home.

Reid Mitchell points out in his book *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* how during the Civil War the empty chair became a symbolic image in the domestic space representing the soldier’s absence. In an effort to relieve the sorrow of those left at home and those separated from families, many handwritten letters crossed the space between home and war. These letters became just as symbolic as the image of the vacant chair.

Early twentieth century letter writing similarly became an abstract bridge and vital connection between home and trenches during the First World War. Letters symbolically took the place of the soldiers in their absence, emblematically filling the vacant chair left empty in the circle of family. As Catherine Golden noted in *Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing*, letters became a way of “weaving” together

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the social fabric of family and community. How could we comprehend this connection between letter writing and Mitchell’s image? Part of this discussion starts with the understanding of how the image of a vacant chair fit into nineteenth century anxiety about the family itself. This image, one that seemed to start during the Civil War in America, surfaced again in the First World War in both Europe and America. This materialization or continuance of Mitchell’s vacant chair image paralleled a progression in social policy that started in the early nineteenth century. Some in society felt the core of family had been threatened by progress and through social reforms tried to correct what they viewed as the damage being done to the family structure. War during the nineteenth century fell into the mix as a culprit that aided in rearranging the dynamics of the family and letter writing, as a result, took on a different perspective in the time of conflict.

Cultural artifacts of the period contain evidence that this symbolic image of the vacant chair, which Mitchell inserts into his history of the Civil War, was not isolated to the mid-1800s. Golden similarly hints at this by listing the many events that affected family and the separation of family. These included, but were not limited to, rapid industrialization, the Napoleonic Wars, the ability to travel to distant places, and immigration. Early twentieth century postcards produced in both Britain and America during the First World War, items sent through the postal service between soldier and family, contain such images that support this observation that the image of the vacant

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3 Ibid, 24.
chair still prevailed symbolically. Some of these images on the postcards even held artistic pictures of George Root’s poem “The Vacant Chair.” The message of these postcards fit well within with social reform movements that erupted during the nineteenth century aimed at protecting the integrity of the family structure. Their images strengthen the notion that letter writing in any form would symbolically fill a vacant chair at home and protect the ties of family, especially in the time of war.

This thesis will explore the role of letters as a symbolic representation of the individual soldier during the First World War. The research provided will answer questions regarding how this representation evolved within the history of family dynamics during the nineteenth century and into the first part of the twentieth century. It will answer why letters became an important symbol during war in symbolically filling the “vacant chair” and it will explain how new interpretations of handwritten letters, by using digital tools, will show that within the written word this vital connection to home can be found too. Examination of the historical aspect of communication by letter writing within the social experiences of the family during the nineteenth century, as well as the study of several social agencies present in the military camps and on the battlefields, demonstrate how important letters, and the act of writing of them, were to those in the trenches and those at home.

Personal correspondence from soldiers during the First World War will also be investigated to gather data through a soldier’s own words of the importance of receiving letters from home. These references in the letters evidence the importance of the receipt of family mail to the well being of a soldier in the time of conflict. Additional analysis of
images and other cultural ephemera of this time will lend to the argument that an abstract link existed between home and the men in the trenches and this abstract connection was realized as an important tool by social agencies to strengthen the act of writing letters and the connection to home.

Reid Mitchell’s book is cornerstone to this thesis argument. His text creates the visual image of an empty chair within the domestic sphere during war. Mitchell’s book also establishes the platform for the framework and research of this thesis, which concerns a bigger problem that existed in the nineteenth century. Here Mitchell mentions briefly the “family in crisis.” By studying issues, which the agricultural communal family faced before and after the years of the Civil War, the evidence presented leads to perceived problems that already existed in the minds of many in society in both America and Britain about the integrity of family relationships. While social responses varied and for not necessarily the same reasons, the disruptions in the family circle due to industrialization were a major focus of the formation of new social programs and agencies. This imagery of the “vacant chair” developed fully into the First World War when many left home for “over there.”

The historiography of both British and American social policy during the nineteenth century affirm that some in society viewed industrialization and urbanization as serious threats to the basic element of community - the family. The ever-changing dynamics of industrialization and worker migration affected the structure of the family as members found themselves separated due to the influence of industrial changes. Many factors played into the thought processes behind social reforms as middle class society
fought to keep alive the cult of domesticity. Reform groups sought numerous avenues to
correct the growing diminished status of the family, which slowly replaced the valued
communal or extended family.

The greatest change would perhaps be the psychology of family affection, the
new emotion, which Michael Grossberg cites in his text “Governing the Hearth” as
becoming the ‘tie that binds.’ Instead of the rural farm practice of having children to
work the land or in a family business, nineteenth century parents decreased the number of
births as the structure of the family changed with industrialization and consumerism, and
new medicines extended the life of an individual. Many children left the villages and
moved to the cities for better jobs and higher wages. This further fractured the
community and rearranged the dynamics of old world agricultural villages. Part of
Britain’s advocates for Rowland Hill’s implementation of the new technology of the
penny postage stamp was a campaign to keep families connected via affordable mail. The
social reform of penny stamps provided a necessary boost to the family framework
by allowing all classes of people to communicate with those who left home to work in the
factories or immigrate to the Americas.

Several groups, like the Red Cross and the Young Men’s Christian Association
(Y.M.C.A.), similarly recognized that the stability of those at home and in the trenches
during wartime depended upon their help in symbolically filling the “vacant chair.”
Examples of their influence in this respect was evidenced in cultural ephemera produced

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4 Michael Grossberg, Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America, (Chapel
during this time. Expensive and elaborately designed letterhead of these agencies filled the hands of the soldiers on the trains and in the camps. Similarly, pre-printed and colorful postcards were constructed and handed out to the men for easy and quick communication to their families. Flyers and brochures displayed the agency’s mottos as a home away from home for soldiers. In addition, the involvement of the Y.M.C.A. and the Red Cross during the war supported the practice of writing letters home by assisting and encouraging letter writing and sometimes even preparing correspondence for the soldiers if they could not. These social groups helped to strengthen this bond between soldier and family. These two agencies, along with several others supported the merging of the domestic and the battlefield, by constant advertising campaigns to write home.

Perhaps the deepest evidence that can be extracted about the connection to home is through the words found in a soldier’s letter. This association and symbolism between letters and home is realized through the implementation of quantifiable measurement. How can digital analysis support and hold up the theory that letters held a different weight of importance during war? What connections can be draw from the word clouds and word graphs of a soldier’s letters? To provide answers to these questions, several hundred letters were processed digitally and analyzed by the use of a digital application (www.Voyant-tools.org). The assessment of four sets of unpublished letters will be compared against two set of published letter collections. The digital analysis of this large volume of materials will complete the picture by showing that there existed in the written word a new interpretation of how important “home” was to a man at war.
Chapter 1 establishes the framework of this paper, by using the image of the “vacant chair,” which Reid Mitchell utilizes in his text, along with the historiography of social developments concerning the family during the nineteenth century in both Britain and America. This chapter will first examine social issues that affected the integrity of the family and then discuss various responses made to these issues such as social reforms and new family laws. This study will help determine why examining letters and postcards during the First World War are important in establishing that part of the advocacy for maintaining a healthy foundation and structure for family was carried out through the act of letter writing. Letters in wartime became a symbolic representation of the individual whose “vacant chair” remained empty, and these same letters kept the structure of the family intact while the soldier was absent from the domestic sphere.

When the sphere of family transitioned from a communal space to a smaller urban group, letters preserved the emotional bonds of the earlier extended family structure. This first chapter frames how issues surrounding family structure and integrity affected reforms, especially letter writing with the implementation of Rowland Hill’s Penny Post. Part of Hill’s argument for the penny post reform was his belief that society would benefit from the strengthening of familial bonds through letter writing, thereby allowing all classes - not just the upper class - to partake in sending and receiving mail.

The second chapter examines the history and the insertion of several social agencies into the context of the military. It follows the historiography of social developments concerning the family by delving deeper into the particular social and humanitarian responses that erupted in the mid-nineteenth century. Through the cultural
ephemera that social agencies produced during the First World War, the connection
together during the time of war, but also how these letters represented the soldier
symbolically.

The last chapter delves into a textual, as well as digital, assessment of six
collections of letters written during the war. These include the unpublished letter
collections of Private Chester Cole from Berlin, Massachusetts; Corporal Sam Riggins of
Liberty, South Carolina; Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, born in Barbados, but served in
the Canadian Field Artillery during the war; and Arthur Joseph Dease, an Irishman who
served as a volunteer ambulance driver with the French Red Cross. Other collections used
in this chapter include the 1918 published letter collections of the Canadian Officer
Coningsby Dawson in Carry On: Letters in War Time and British Officer Paul Jones’
War Letters of a Public School Boy - Paul Jones.

It is important to note that it is only through the unpublished letter of the everyday
soldier that a truer sense of the connection to the domestic is gathered. The product
produced from digital analysis is a visual measurement through word clouds and word
graphs. Why would this be so? The reason unpublished letters are important in this
respect is that published letters such as Paul Jones or Coningsby Dawson’s collections
were edited for content and were published for specific purposes. In addition, those
published in wartime were done so for a variety of reasons, not least of which was
military or government censorship, a particular political issue, or for smaller agendas such as the drive to reinforce morale issues or ask the public to purchase war bonds. The association to the space of the domestic was stripped from the pages. Unpublished letters contain the most authentic picture of war, the soldiers’ experience, and contain the words that express his need for the connection to “home.” Here the digital analysis will produce a genuine sense of the importance of home to the men in the trenches by quickly providing a quantifiable product that can measure word choices and word trends within the letters.
CHAPTER ONE

FILLING THE VACANT CHAIR IN WAR

I am very glad to say that my two great difficulties have changed for the better, by that I mean, I have been receiving mail from home more frequently and rapidly. I also take very much delight in saying that the weather also has become more friendly and warmer and I might say a great deal drier.  

Jimmy Carrick, stationed in Bourges, France in 1919, to his brother, Joseph

To soldiers and those at home, hand-written letters were important. Receiving mail was essential and the military, as well as social agencies attached with the military during the First World War, encouraged letter writing to their troops. This connection through hand-written letters created a distinct merging of the domestic space with that of the front lines. This relationship was not only supported by the military, but by various social agencies, like the Red Cross and the Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) Part of the push behind the encouragement of letter writing was a need to enhance the connection of the trenches to the home front and vice versa. Letters written during war seemed to carry a different weight of importance than at any other time and we should ask why the military and these social agencies were so involved in this bond? Why did they promote letter writing during the war so heavily? How did it become that way?

Histories of social agencies like the Red Cross and Y.M.C.A., as well as a historiography of the social conditions surrounding the family during the nineteenth

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century, will shed some light on this relationship between domestic and battlefield. In examining the social dynamics surrounding the family created by industrialization, as well as the role of social agencies and the services they provided to the boys in the war, a clearer picture of why this link by letters was so important becomes apparent. To understand why letters written in conflict carried such valuable weight, this chapter will start with the examination of the proceeding years before the First World War and the social transformation occurring around and within the family. Through the comparison of changes in both British and American society, this chapter will establish how and why a necessary connection developed between the soldiers and those on the home front through pen and paper.

When defining the broad types of social changes that affected the general well being of the family structure, we need look no further than the modernization of industry and transportation, and certainly the shift of population from rural to urban areas. Concerned citizens, largely from the Victorian middle classes, became the champions of social reforms, especially since aspects of modernization appeared to them to be a big disruption in the integrity of what they considered to be a stable part of society - the family. By constructing laws and forming social agencies aimed at keeping the family intact through social programs, the middle class created a domestic cult that embodied the ideals of family connections and relationships. The effort of the middle class to uphold an ideal family structure in the domestic sphere played an important role in State and Government interference in the family as well (the Temperance movement being a prime example) and this movement played an important role in letter writing during wartime.
During the war, letters, or even postcards, became a vital connection for soldier and family. Letters were not just forms of communication; they carried enormous value to those receiving them. Lack of communication affected the family if they did not hear from their soldier just as not getting letters at mail call affected the state of mind and well-being of the soldiers in the trenches. The movement of mail therefore was essential during war. These letters and postcards became a symbolic representation of the person writing them: the ink used, the paper touched, the lipstick marks next to the words “I love you,” all carried meaning; they were a representation of the spirit and memory of the person constructing them.

Reid Mitchell’s book, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home*, a volume about the Northern soldier’s experience during the Civil War, provides a strong platform in which to understand the necessity of letter writing during war. While Mitchell’s volume specifically addresses the situation of the American home front during the Civil War, the relevance of this text is his creation of a specific visual image. Mitchell’s reference to George Root’s poem, “The Vacant Chair,” unwittingly directs this chapter’s investigative journey by focusing on the image of a vacant chair in the home, one once occupied by the soldier who is now in the battlefield. The “vacant chair” in the home, as seen in one’s mind, is key to comprehending the unfolding social anxiety occurring in the nineteenth century regarding domestic relationships. The integrity of the family structure became the concern of those who championed the domestic cult. Many of those in the middle classes felt that modernization and industrial growth, as well as war, would threaten or damage the stable family structure. Great fear grew out of the
unfolding developments in the nineteenth century and the relevance of the visual of the “vacant chair” becomes important to understanding the mentality of society leading up to the First World War.

The first stanzas of George Root’s poem read, “We shall meet, but we shall miss him, There will be one vacant chair; We shall linger to caress him, While we breathe our evening prayer.” 7 Here, in this poem, is the visual given by Mitchell that suggestively hints at melancholy emotions a family may have felt at the absence of their soldier. The poem, popular in the Civil War, eventually became transformed into a hymn sung during the funerals of soldiers killed in action. Interestingly, fifty years later, it also became part of iconic imagery used on postcards sent through the mail system of both England and America. The “vacant chair” image strongly endured as a representation of the missing soldier from home up through the First World War.

Contrary to the social myth that war makes a man, leaving home for a soldier in the capacity to battle, or sacrifice life, was not a normal action. It was a disruption in that individual life, as well as in the day-to-day functions of family life to which that individual belonged. Mitchell points to a paradox about soldiers in the battlefield. Northern culture, during the time of the Civil War, placed domesticity at the center of society, so there was never really an entirely masculine world, not even on the battlefield. Even with the camaraderie of the men in the trenches, the domestic was still a needed element in the soldier’s life. 8 This statement rings true for modern wars, especially so for

the First World War. Paul Fussell’s well-known volume, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, similarly hints at this need for the domestic in the battlefields. Fussell described how the British soldiers decorated the trenches like a small home, with pictures tacked up against the dirt walls and labeled trench lines with street names. “Directional and traffic control signs were everywhere in the trenches, giving the whole system the air of a parody modern city…” Fussell noted that the reshaping of the space of the trench suggested a deep mentality of domestic connection.⁹

While Mitchell directed his analysis towards the Northern soldier and community during the Civil War, the image he referenced of the “vacant chair” continued well into the twentieth century. The words from George Root’s poem never faded away after 1865. Cultural ephemera of the modern age contain traces of his words. There was a continued use of this image first established by Mitchell’s adaptation of the symbolism from Root’s poem - of a man missing from the domestic circle, of the vacant chair. References to this image surfaced, not only in America, but also in Britain, on postcards (See Figures 1.1-1.5)¹⁰. This visual evidence shows that this symbolism of the vacant chair remained, particularly on items specifically designed for communication between family and soldier.

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¹⁰ *The Vacant Chair*, (Holmfirth: Bamforth & Co., LTD), British Series No. 4797 and American Series No. 399. *The vacant chair. Devant la place de l’absent*...(London: Inter-Art Co. Red Lion Square), “TWO-O-Nine” Series No. 214. These particular postcards reflect the continuation of the “vacant chair” theme that developed in the Civil War era and continued into the First World War.
Figures 1.1 - 1.3: British set of “The Vacant Chair” postcards. Each card contains a stanza of George Root’s Civil War poem.

Figures 1.4 and 1.5: American #2 postcard of “The Vacant Chair” series and the French version of “The Vacant Chair.”

Postcards by the English company, Bamforth & Co., Ltd. from their New York Office. In the Images 1.1 - 1.3, the scenes represents a classic Victorian home of an England family, while the fourth postcard, Image 1.4, published by the same company, placed an American Flag in the picture on the backwall and the home was most likely representative of a traditional American middle class family. The last postcard displays the French flag as well as referencing the “vacant chair,” and was published by Inter-Art Co., Bed Lion Square in London. All postcards carry “the vacant chair” image referenced in Reid Mitchell’s book.
The words “communication” and “family” are strong words. Both denote a tie to relationships. “Communication” is a connection between people and family are individuals connected through marriage and birth. With the word “family,” there is insinuation that an unusual bond exists, something deeper and longer lasting than just friendship between individuals. In the social structure, “family” means a relationship present in kinship. Families tie individuals together in a bond through “blood and marriage.”\(^\text{11}\) Within these relationships, there is also a sense of obligation.\(^\text{12}\) The family structure places individuals together through obligations for one another. While the range of kinship varies in each family, the obligations felt by the members of this kinship can be both emotional and economical.\(^\text{13}\) Even Karl Marx placed the family at the core of society’s structure (even though he attacked it in his writings) when he addressed the core of economic relationships. He stated that men “who daily remake their own life, begin to make other men, to propagate their kind: the relation between man and wife, parents and children, the FAMILY.”\(^\text{14}\) The family structure has grown over time into a tight relation of blood and marriage, and has become the important foundation of society. Fernand Braudel even noted in his thesis that some “structures, because of their long life, become stable elements for an infinite number of generations.”\(^\text{15}\) This structure of the family has been around for a long time and is the most important part of a stable social environment.

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\(^{11}\) Adrain Wilson, *Family*, (Florence: Routledge, 1985), 7.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.


Long before the First World War erupted, the family sphere did not resemble what it eventually became today. In the 1600s, children, after the age of seven, were treated like adults and sent to work in order to help with the support of the family, or if they were from wealthier families, sent away to school. It was not until after the industrial revolution, in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, that “full adult responsibility was delayed.” Young men or women did not leave home until married. Therefore, when at the age of eighteen, these youth volunteered, or were conscripted for the First World War, it threatened the family circle and the connection of those members within it.

Mitchell stated that during war a bond existed between the communities and the soldiers they sent to war. The strongest “chain” that community had on their soldiers was their families, and families and soldiers needed to hear from one another. Letters (or postcards) were the vital connection. Even though a soldier left home to become a man, and in doing so, severed his familial ties, as Mitchell stated, there always remained a need for a connection to the domestic on the battlefield, no matter how independent he tried to be. In order to understand this paradox of independence and dependence, the relationship between the space of the trenches and the space of the domestic needs explanation through exploring the social changes in the nineteenth century and their impact on the family.

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16 Wilson, *Family*, 3.
17 Ibid.
19 Ibid, 34.
Military life upset much of the nineteenth century ideas on social order, especially with regard to the family structure. Mitchell noted that war acted as an additional threat to family relationships by disrupting the normal patterns of interaction and connection. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there already existed social anxiety concerning the integrity of the traditional family circle. In the minds of some American and British people, there was a growing fracture of the family core created by the development of technology and industrialization. In the case of the British Empire, travel abroad separated family for some that were employed within the empire system, and for others, military service cleaved the family apart as sons and fathers who enlisted were shipped to distant places.

Mitchell referred to this separation and disconnect from the domestic familial structure as a “family in crisis” scenario. Is this “family in crisis” theory valid? If so, exactly how did the “family in crisis” theme play into the connections of a soldier and his community during the First World War? Moreover, was this theme of crisis typical for both Britain and the United States, or were there notable differences? Could Mitchell’s argument be the basis of why letters became a symbolic representation of the soldier, filling the “vacant chair” left at home? Moreover, did this feeling of family crisis create the basis for the merging of the domestic with the battlefield, and the implementation of the link between the military and social agencies on the front lines?

Before the First World War belligerents marched into battle, the nineteenth century was a turbulent time for the family, not just in Britain but also in America.

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20 Ibid, 73.
21 Ibid, 91.
Industrialization, and urbanization, created a new set of problems for the institution of the family, especially for the middle, working, and lower classes. Members of the family moved away from home, some because of shifting economies and others choosing immigration, to find work. For many individuals, gone was the time when the rural communal home was the ideal and obvious framework of familial relationships. The new century of modernization seemed to be transforming the family and shifting the lines of its definition.

When the industrial revolution took hold in America and England, the old world framework of the agricultural family fractured, as sons or daughters worked within the new economic structure of the factory. Some children even moved out of the house to live closer to their places of work. In America, many factories (textile mills are an example) created new towns for their workers to live in. Adult sons and daughters left with their children to live in these new towns, moving away from extended families (parents and grandparents) and their love and support.\footnote{Patrick Horan and Peggy Hargis, “Children’s Work and Schooling in the Late Nineteenth-Century Family Economy,” \textit{American Sociological Review}, 56, no. 5 (1991), 587.} In Britain, many young women and men left the rural spaces for the urban, to live in overcrowded housing and work in the factories. Industrialization therefore recreated the core of family structure in both societies, and redefined the organism of the family and its individual members.

Mitchell noted that in America before 1861, there was some consensus from certain middle class conservative groups that the family, seen as the “most fundamental institution of society and the body politic,” was soon to be an item of the past, as industrialization and urbanization took the very strands that held the family together and
severed them.\textsuperscript{23} Michael Grossberg in \textit{Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America} also stated that developments within the social and economic spheres of the nation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, moved towards a “predominately bourgeois, capitalist society,” which marked a “change in family life” by modifying the traditional ways.\textsuperscript{24} These changes slowly undermined the once tightly bound bonds of family by the growing and fluctuating economic dynamics of the New World.

Viewed from a feminist lens, Michelle Adams, in her article “Women’s Rights and Wedding Bells: 19th-Century Pro-Family Rhetoric and (Re)Enforcement of the Gender Status Quo,” contributed to Grossberg’s assessment by positing that the “pro-family crusade” of the nineteenth century was a response to the rise of women’s fight for rights.\textsuperscript{25} In 1870, the National League for the Protection of the Family was created in a direct answer to the “first wave of the women’s rights movement.” Conservative society viewed women outside of the home as a contrary action to the upholding of the stable family structure and a distinct move against the revered eighteenth century republican ideals of family relationships.\textsuperscript{26}

Similar social and economic forces played out in Britain too. Catherine Golden, in her text, \textit{Posting it: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing}, also noted disruptions to the British family during the early nineteenth century. Besides rapid industrialization,

\textsuperscript{23} Mitchell, \textit{The Vacant Chair}, 91.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 506.
men left their families to fight in the Napoleonic wars (1805-1815), and some begin to leave home to travel for education or gainful employment.\footnote{Catherine Golden, \textit{Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing}, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 24.} This was an era of expanding population, increasing mobility from rising immigration, and the rapid expansion of the British Empire.\footnote{Ibid.}

John Darwin, in \textit{The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System 1830-1970}, further expanded on this rupture in British society, by defining how the empire affected the family structure within the strategic management framework of Britain’s territories. The concept of “imperial defense” with respect to the Empire’s colonies and their resources, forced the Victorians into a new mind set, which fitted itself around geopolitical expansion and “world economy.”\footnote{John Darwin, \textit{The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System 1830-1970}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 26.} In this empire system, British citizens, particularly those in the army, had to relocate within the empire structure of colony management. Some left for many years in this context and the core of family structure thus became severed by great distances.

Historians agree that society, in both Britain and America, faced disruptions, especially to the family, by way of industrialization. The transformation thrust upon the family in the nineteenth century created an anxiety for some individuals about the stability of society. How were they to cope with these disruptions? In managing these fears, how did middle class reformers eventually affect or initiate the direct link between the domestic and battlefield during the First World War? To answer these two questions, a closer look at the responses from individuals and/or groups within Britain and America...
during the nineteenth century will shed light on how certain social agencies eventually
developed and used programs to protect the integrity of the family, particularly in war.

One of the first places to begin with constructing a clearer understanding of society fear regarding the collapse of the stable family structure will be to revisit Mitchell’s “family in crisis” scenario. Grossberg, in a section titled “Crisis of the Family,” in the Introduction of his book, similarly expressed this concept. He noted that America’s nostalgia for the republican family virtues of the late eighteenth century made those in the early nineteenth century become obsessive with “the well-being of the American household.”

Apparently, the wide availability of land and other types of business prospects in the new frontier severed “filial dependence” as young adults migrated away from communities towards the great expanse of the west.

Concerns for the integrity for the family formed in the early 1800s based on fear of impending social changes. Middle classes felt that American families were moving away from the traditional republican structure of familial relationships by way of migration and other influences, such as industrialization. In 1837, David Hoffman, a legal commentator, insisted that a relationship existed between “government and our firesides” and that social monitors should be put in place to safeguard and protect the diminishing social values the founding fathers built the country on.

From the 1830s to the 1850s, America experienced a change in its dynamics. Factors such as the ever-changing national boundaries, relocation of army support for

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30 Grossberg, Governing the Hearth, 9.
31 Ibid, 5.
32 Ibid, 10.
Indian removal, the eruption of the Spanish War, and the annexation of Texas, Oregon, and California that opened up the West for migration, all affected community ties.\textsuperscript{33} As time progressed, the republican family establishment gave way to modification and individualism. Families at the beginning of the twentieth century were less willing “to sacrifice domestic autonomy” to communal directives.\textsuperscript{34}

Grossberg placed the initial movements of self-appointed family reformers, which consisted of the genteel “social-purity advocates, clerical crusaders, philanthropic volunteers, social scientists, feminists, medical and legal professionals,” in the mid-1800s. This particular group of social reformers undertook a “surveillance of domestic affairs” and published numerous reports “on the state of the family” as more territory opened for settlement and those in the urban areas moved towards the frontiers, and the populations shifted, breaking apart the tradition family circle. Social reformers had many faces during this time. Some were conservative and traditional, others radical, championing socialist or feminist agendas, and there were some individuals who defied categorization, but they championed causes that fell in line with either the conservative or radical approach towards legislation that affected the family structure. Grossberg further stated that by the 1840s, these reformers “began to speak of a ‘crisis of the family’,” and this assessment propelled the formation of new laws directed at governance of the domestic sphere in hopes of stabilizing its apparent decline.\textsuperscript{35}


\textsuperscript{34} Grossberg, \textit{Governing the Hearth}, 5.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
These new American reformers initiated legislation aimed at the relationship of the family. The need to protect the domestic sphere and keep the traditional republican views of family integrity intact grew in strength, as the definitions of traditional family roles appeared threatened by a new type of law practice - family law. Reformers wanted to emphasize the needs of family over personal welfare and independence. Lawrence Friedman, a legal historian, noted that the new family laws of this time became “codified in statutes” as the legal system penetrated “deeper into society.” Family law was distinct in that it governed new legal conceptions of matrimony and parenthood. These new legal definitions threatened the sanctity of the conservative definitions of what the family structure should be.

Some reformers viewed individualism and self-indulgence with distaste, considering these qualities part of the underlying social factor that was producing this “crisis in the family.” These same reformers were instrumental in forcing a more active role of public authority in households in hopes of keeping conservative parameters of family structure in place. New legal guidelines for the domestic relationship of husband and wife created further tension when “marital unions were increasingly defined as private contracts” and women could express more independence than they had before.

Legal statutes became an instrument that made family members defined as separate

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36 Ibid, 12.
37 Ibid, 10.
38 Ibid, 16.
39 Ibid, 18.
40 Ibid, 20.
individuals even in the structure of a home. In the view of those who worshiped the republican family concept, this use of family legal modes created a division in the family group by promoting a greater reliance on law to settle conflicts within the domestic spaces, and pitted members of the household against one another in the court systems.

A heightened response came in the mid-1800s when social reformers called for the “elimination of family diversity and the imposition of orthodox” republican ideas of family. In response to the perceived threat against the family structure, The New York Moral Reform Society initiated a campaign against prostitution. The American Medical Association followed with a similar response and launched a project in the 1850s to distribute written material that taught health in family life and advocated anti-abortion legislation. In 1870, the National League for the Protection of the Family concentrated its efforts on a “national drive for family-law reform through legislation and public education.” The League, intent on preserving the family, specifically concentrated its efforts towards the issue of divorce and its impact on the domestic sphere. Samuel Dike, a spokesperson of the League, maintained that the increasing “individualism” of the population (with an emphasis on women having equal rights in marriage and divorce) was a “subtle foe of the American family.” Michele Adams summarized the League’s viewpoints by noting that conservatives in society viewed feminist movements as “threats to the natural family.” Reports forthcoming from the League contributed to the growing

41 Ibid, 11.
42 Ibid.
44 Ibid, 514.
social anxiety that women outside the home had abandoned their roles in the family, which in turn contributed towards the demise of the traditional family hierarchy.\textsuperscript{45}

In spite of these reformer’s efforts, America’s legal movement towards this notion of individualism within the family did not waver. By 1889, states had legal codes that contained language that defined marriage as a civil contract.\textsuperscript{46} Family law became the “chief instrument” states used to determine the legal, social, and economic responsibilities of individual family members, and the boundaries within which families operated. Legal supporters of these laws that redefined the domestic relationships of family members “played a prominent role in defining and enforcing household roles,” all of which starkly conflicted with the views of those who wished to create measures that would eliminate this separation of family in the domestic sphere.\textsuperscript{47}

When war erupted on the European continent in 1914, middle class women were the “captains” of social reforms for the family. Many were concerned “with the nurture of children, and by extension, with the nurture of human life.” The conservative movement towards family integrity often overflowed into pacifist and anti-war agendas. A motto emerged from several organizations that centered on the “protection of home.” This movement to protect the domestic space gathered strength through peace rallies and marches protesting the conflict. To these women, war became itself as much a threat to the family as to the country.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 517.
\textsuperscript{46} Grossberg, \textit{Governing the Hearth}, 23.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 30.
It is unfortunate though that a further fracture appeared to the domestic sphere because of the women who participated in the anti-war rallies. Several key supporters of the peace organizations, which promoted “protection of home,” joined forces with suffrage leaders who also participated in anti-war movement. These were the same suffrage women that championed women’s rights and were accused by conservative males of moving society away from the republican view of stable family values. It created friction within the ranks of the peace movements concerning the role of women in the home. While much of the suffragists’ language in their peace rallies attempted to appeal to the “motherhood instinct,” some of their rhetoric instead had the effect of forcing many conservative women to rethink the message. When suffragists stated that it was women, the “custodians of the human race,” who should right the “folly of male governments,” anti-suffragists countered with the assertion that men were the only “natural” defense of the nation.49 It is here, in this conflict of viewpoints between the suffragists and conservative women that a key component to the juxtaposition of the domestic sphere with that of the spaces of war becomes apparent, particularly in the responses forthcoming from those who asserted women were the “custodians of the human race.”

Jane Addams, a key suffragist of the period, in speaking out against the war in Europe, acknowledged that with “…the rise of industry and the evolution of the basis of government from force to mutual consent, government had come more and more within the woman’s sphere. It had become… ‘enlarged housekeeping,’ and the wisdom of the

49 Ibid, 197-200.
world’s traditional housekeepers was needed to guide its action.\textsuperscript{50} It is in this phrase that an emerging new relationship between State and domestic can be identified. Addams’ statement provides the basis of how the domestic could be projected outward into the world and onto the battlefield.

Women felt responsibility for their homes and the upkeep of the family. The world had shrunk by way of progress and industrialization at the beginning of the twentieth century. Connections across continents between these groups were easier by way of advancement in communication. War now threatened this new structure and, by the same token, the structure of the family within this new global entity. The call for a new sphere of ‘housekeeping,’ was parallel to the desire of some middle class women to sweep away those elements that threatened the traditional modes of family.

Linking domestic concerns with national ‘housekeeping’ in a wider context was not only identified in American women but found in British women too. Susan Pyecroft, in her article “British Working Women and the First World War,” noted that, contrary to historical belief, the First World War was not necessarily a turning point for British working-women since almost one-third of the female population had already found employment in the workforce by 1914. This certainly threatened the viewpoint of British middle class who valued the idea “of the stay-at-home, non-working wife.”\textsuperscript{51} While union leaders in the factories pushed for a return of the women to the domestic space, by the time the war unfolded more and more women had become visible outside the home,

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 201.
with many stepping into the places of their “missing fathers, brothers, and husbands in family businesses.”

The notion of being national ‘housekeepers’ became evident when David Lloyd George urged suffragist Emmaline Pankhurst to assemble an “army” of women in 1915 to “create the War Service for Women Campaign.” This social agency helped to recruit workers for the munitions plants and other facilities producing needed war commodities. Not only were working class women involved, but the campaign also brought out of the domestic space “many ‘educated’ and ‘well-to-do’ women who had never before worked.” This new “army” aided in the “housekeeping” of the nation through its patriotic service during war.

What becomes evident is the fact that at the beginning of the First World War there existed a link between the domestic and the industrial for both working and some middle-class women. This connection feeds back to Addams’ statement that because of the evolution of industry, women were needed in the housekeeping of a nation, and it allowed, by association, the State to insert itself “more and more within the woman’s sphere” through social agencies. Did a similar path of developing anxiety and fear concerning the family structure exist in Britain during the nineteenth century? If so, how did it play into the fact that by 1914, social agencies, already connected to the domestic space, now overlapped onto the battlefields?

The notion of a “crisis in the family,” does not seem to appear in the minds of British social reform advocates in the nineteenth century though. (These social reformers

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52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
have been previously identified as varied - some with conservative tendencies and others radical.) The changes that affected England’s families were viewed differently. Well-known historian Walter Houghton expressed in *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* that the British “sense of crisis” pointed more towards a fear in the breakdown of the “traditional authority of the church and the aristocracy.” Industrialization, while changing the old traditional sense of family, seemed to highlight “middle-class achievements” and a newfound sense of “bourgeois ideals.” While there may have been some small concerns about the integrity of family connections, the expanding forces of business, scientific development, and the growth of democracy brought with it a sense of well-being and satisfaction so a need to address family disruption was not as urgent an issue as it was in America. Perhaps the greatest fear in Victorian society during this period would have been about the emergence and restlessness of the working classes and the loss to middle class freedom.

Houghton notes that for much of the century what was on the minds of Victorian society was the memory of the French Revolution, and much “dread” existed that at any moment there would be a “wild outbreak of the masses,” an overthrow of order and “confiscation of property.” This was certainly fueled by the 1848 crisis, which was followed by “riots in London, Liverpool, Glasgow, and other large towns” in response to new Poor Laws that had earlier been enacted. Added to this was the blatant unwillingness of an upper class Parliament to repeal the Corn Laws. The established classes, with their

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55 Ibid.
56 Ibid, 54.
57 Ibid, 55.
roots in agriculture, feared that this would lead to revolution among the workers.\textsuperscript{58} Along with these riots and the general fear of uprisings, advocates for reform also cited a noticeable decline of Christianity and the core values that the religion embodied. The apparent decreased morals of people and the disintegration of faith in British society paralleled the American anxiety surrounding the diminishing value of the republican family and its virtues.

David I. Kertzer, in his essay “Living with Kin,” also addressed the effects on the English family by way of industrialization. Kertzer’s views on the middle class families differed from Houghton’s by referencing Frederic Le Play, a notable French contemporary social observer of the period and his empirical study on the evolution of families across Europe. Kertzer outlined the Frenchman’s argument about social anxiety and the loss of traditional familial structure by noting a warning Le Play wrote in his study. Le Play observed that the social upheavals during the early nineteenth century were greatly “associated with the spread of both Enlightenment ideas to the masses, and less abstractly, the spread of industrialization” along with the growth of cities. All of these elements, according to Le Play, contributed to the decline of the traditional family structure.\textsuperscript{59} The traditional, patrilaterally, extended family of the late eighteenth century was rapidly being replaced by the “unstable family” that had emerged from the quickly spreading “industrializing population.”\textsuperscript{60} Le Play defined the “unstable family” as a product of the working class population reduced to “living in nuclear families,” where

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 58.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
most of their children were “abandoned at or before their own marriages, leaving their parents and other kin behind, and showing no obligation for their welfare.”61

Kertzer’s research also addresses changes that happened during the mid-1800s to the English family structure due to industrialization. These changes, forced by industrialization, brought out feelings and emotions associated with a sense of loss of one’s community. “When the ties that had bound men to their country neighbors and their ancestral village were snapped by the exodus to the factory towns and metropolitan London,” he writes, human beings become “largely casual and amorphous.” Houghton’s words also reflect this loss of kinship. The new social connections of the changing family “as Beatrice Webb found them in London later, had ‘no roots in neighborhood, in vocation, in creed, or for that matter in race.’”62 Thus, the families in British society seemed to be moving away from a sense of community and more towards isolation from family ties, though there was not the urgency in Britain to label this change as a “crisis in the family.”

In 1851, Britain discovered through the census of that year that for the first time in the history of the “mainland of the United Kingdom” more people lived in towns than in the countryside.63 Studies of the economical changes due to the rapid industrialization illustrated that this shift in population undermined the development and stability of lower and middle class families and their welfare. Conservative groups that championed the ideal family, which to them reflected a stable, harmonious, and peasant family

61 Ibid, 41.
62 Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 79.
environment, felt that industrialization had negatively affected the family structure. Part of their worry stemmed from the fact that agricultural families had begun to send many of their young girls to larger cities to work as servants in order to help support their families. In 1851 statistics showed that “practically a third of both boys and girls aged 15-19 were living in households of non-kin.” Smaller children also suffered. In some instances, parents had to give up their infants to the state or religious orders because they did not have the means to take care of them. In the city slums, there was not the availability of “kin and neighborhood networks,” which had existed in the rural settings, to help with support in times of difficulty.

The stable, traditional, British family changed in other ways too. Families in the cities were nuclear and did not place the same value on extended ties with relatives outside the immediate corpus of father, mother, and children. This rupture of extended familial relations caused many adult children to lose their emotional ties to their parents as well. When aged parents began to lose the ability to be independent and were forced to seek help from their offspring, their adult children “found reasons to be rid of them” because they did not want the expense of looking after ill, aging parents. Many elderly people became dependent on the State for welfare and were placed in England’s workhouses, and thus, as the nineteenth century unfolded, “national and local governments” despite the reigning liberal creed became increasingly “involved with family policy.” The changing dynamic of the family created in fact a need for State

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64 Kertzer and Barbagli, *Family Life*, xxix.
67 Ibid, 162.
interference. H.C.G. Matthew noted in his essay, “The Liberal Years (1851-1914)” in *The Oxford History of Britain*, that some developments that caused the relocations of populations to urban areas had, by 1901, moved approximately 80 percent of Britain’s population from the countryside.

The reduction of family size was also caused by the need to seek higher wages and more income for economic well-being. Those in the working classes reduced the size of their family as they became aware of economics, moreover, seeing that fewer children meant more money in their pockets. Many working class men and women waited longer before marrying, and this too affected the number of children, as a late marriage reduced the number of reproductive years for a woman. It appeared that the value and need for an extended family diminished along with the rise in capitalism, a product of the Victorian era England.

It is important to note at this point that the Liberal viewpoints of the Victorian age created a dichotomy between what the middle class considered the ideal family and how industrialization was transforming the family. Even within the Victorian families, notable smaller changes occurred as the nineteenth century came to its closure. These middle class families began to place less emphasis on family than “individual achievement.” Personal accomplishment became an important characteristic that members of Victorian families valued. A habit developed of sending children away to boarding schools for an expensive education in the hopes that their offspring would advance further in society.

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68 Ibid, 156.
69 Matthew, “The Liberal Age,” 529-533.
70 Ibid, 537.
71 Ibid, 543.
There were those in the middle class who viewed this transition as another element that “weakened the roots” in the family structure.72 For the middle class families, the need to maintain a house, pay servants, children’s school, and university fees, from the 1850s onward influenced the size of middle class British families.73 This trend naturally lowered the birth rates and family size. Adding to this change in family structure was the fact that many middle class women increasingly desired more from life than just children and household duties and sought fulfillment outside the domestic sphere.74

It was the work of conservative middle class women, in hopes of curtailing the degeneration of the family, which began many of the initiatives of the period to support reform concerning the integrity of the family structure. Social organizations, started by this group, promoted programs such as the Public Health Act of 1872, and later, in the early years of the twentieth century, were instrumental in pushing for more extensive Factory Acts that provided help for working women and children by limiting the hours of the workday and restricting the ages of children employed. This same group of conservative individuals was instrumental in securing government legislation to protect women and children in the workplace, but their greater interest was in creating instruction in the home for appropriate “family and childcare” practices, which was part of the desire to maintain the integrity of familial relationships.75 Unfortunately, later statistics showed that life for the women of the lower classes did not change much.76

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72 Ibid, 544.
73 Ibid, 546.
74 Ibid.
75 Kertzer and Barbagli, Family Life, xxxvii.
76 Ibid.
At the end of the nineteenth century, though, the considerable drop in infant mortality rates documented a positive change for the initiatives of these groups. Those who advocated for reforms felt a continued need to support women in the home as well as in the work place.\textsuperscript{77} Although these social programs started in the 1870s, England’s government continued its commitment towards social changes, particularly in providing education for mothers, notably the instruction on better practices for caring for children. These educational programs included lessons for mothers on “proper child-rearing in order to instill useful work habits, ensure proper hygiene, develop approved family values, and decrease childhood deaths.”\textsuperscript{78}

Britain’s reform movement towards the family also brought about the reconstruction of the Poor Law program of the workhouses. State welfare at the beginning of the nineteenth century had created a rift in the family by separating family members who sought relief. The “prison-like workhouses” severed “kinship bonds” by sending children to one place and parents to another.\textsuperscript{79} The Poor Law was revised in the latter part of the nineteenth century so as to provide allowances for parents and children to remain together, and in 1908, the Children’s Act followed up these reforms by giving the state the responsibility to protect children in certain circumstances.\textsuperscript{80}

While the thrust of these reform movements aimed at, and committed to, maintaining the integrity of the family structure, other reforms went the opposite direction. As in America, the impact of particular legal reforms regarding marriage

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Fuchs, “Charity and Welfare,” 181.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, 167.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 181.
affected family structure and cohesion. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 set up secular divorce courts, thus moving divorce suits from the ecclesiastical Court of Arches, to newly created divorce courts. This created the possibility of the other classes of people, besides the wealthy, of filing for a divorce.81 Similarly, these new laws created protection of individuals within the family unit and supported individualism in the family unit. By the time of the First World War, British society witnessed a similar change, as in America, in the legal relationship between husband and wife, which thereby further contested the previous ideal of perfect family hierarchy.

Many activists questioned whether the trend in the law to recognize the legal independence of each family member was good for society as a whole. While government reforms aimed at keeping the familiar hierarchy intact, there was still “strong individualism,” especially in legal reforms.82 The Liberal government after 1906 seemed in many ways to challenge the Victorian principles that embraced “individual probity and diligence,” though even among liberals there were some who questioned whether the State ought to interfere in family affairs. By 1906, however, the pace of social reform increasingly challenged traditional notions of family and family structure.83 This challenge was visible in such state welfare reforms as free school meals in 1907 and in 1908 old age pensions.84 Yet, even David Lloyd George, “full of Welsh radical fire

83 Ibid, 16.
84 Matthew, “The Liberal Age,” 574-575.
though he was,” did not go beyond the limits of a comfortable barrier to State involvement.85

The First World War did not disrupt the pace of these social reforms or the activity of some of the social agencies who advocated for the family. These advocates came from all spectrums of society particularly from those who saw war as the great threat to the family. On August 2, 1914, a Labour movement demonstrated against the war and on August 4, Mrs. Fawcett of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, delivered a “women’s protest against war,” on behalf of those who publically supported peace.86 These demonstrations illustrate that, contrary to popular history, there existed in Britain opposition against the war. For some, this opposition to the war was based not on pacifist or socialist principles, but on how the war might affect certain portions of society - namely the family. In answer to many who felt concern about the family unit, and the effect of the war on family, the British Government, at the urging of middle class reformers, implemented additional social programs to help the family structure during the war crisis.

A major concern stemmed from an anticipated hike in the price of “ordinary food-stuffs.”87 In response, the British Government established the Committee on the Prevention and Relief of Distress on August 4, 1914. Arthur Henderson, a prominent figure of the Labour Movement, initiated on August 5 a conference “of all organizations affiliated” with Labour to create the Worker’s National Committee. Their purpose was

85 Marwick, The Deluge, 16.
86 Ibid, 32.
87 Ibid.
“to watch over the special interests of the working classes during the War Emergency.” Additionally, the Prince of Wales publically sent an appeal on August 6, 1914, to set up a National Relief Fund to help those in need, especially war widows. Thus, from the onset of the First World War, concern for the integrity of family structure affected government policy as they strove to protect its members during the crisis.

The historiography of family relations in both Britain and America illustrates that throughout the nineteenth century there existed trepidation about the effect of industrialization upon the family structure. Some social advocates in America initiated activities for safeguarding the family because they perceived there was a sort of “crisis in the family.” These social reformers fought to keep an ideal form of family alive, one that paralleled the values of Republican virtues. Those in Britain, while not advocating the same type of familial crisis, nonetheless maintained a similar nostalgia for the practices and virtues of rural family life and desired to protect this desirable ideal family structure from the stresses and chaotic changes created by the rapid pace of industrialization. It should be understood that in both countries, the transformation of family relationships of the middle and working classes was exacerbated by economic and social developments tied with industrialization. The deconstruction of the old world agricultural circle of family relationships and construction of new urban nuclear families due to the implementation of industrial progress created some unease and distress for those who perceived these changes as detrimental to society structure itself.

88 Ibid.
When the Great War erupted for Britain, it was the first instance in which there was total war. New technologies, new weaponry, the total involvement of civilians as well as soldiers in war, and the death of untold numbers threatened the very fabric of society itself. Here young boys and young women often left their homes for the very first time. Some, such as Rudyard Kipling’s son Jack celebrated their eighteenth birthday in the dirty mud of the trenches. While America did not immediately enter as a belligerent, some in her families sent volunteers, both men and women, ‘over there’ and eventually, after 1917, as soldiers.

The war added to the already growing anxiety certain social reformers had about family relationships and its integrity. What could be more of a rupture in family than the separation in war of youths from their mothers and fathers? Faced with the image of a “vacant chair” in the domestic space as these young men and women left home, those who remained behind needed a temporary substitute for its missing member. Letters and postcards thus became that vital piece of protection for the family during this break in normalcy. The letters and postcards, detailing a day’s activity or the emotions of the moment, replaced the body that had once sat in the “vacant chair.”

Mitchell’s “vacant chair” image also powerfully suggest at the modifications taking place in the sphere of “family.” It is easy to see how this absence of a family member (soldier) in the First World War added to the chaotic stress already placed on the family structure during the nineteenth century. The First World War placed additional burden on families who experienced separation when there appeared a rather large number of “vacant chairs” in the households of both countries, particularly Britain. These
gaping holes in the domestic sphere threatened the very fabric of society itself. Marc Bloch, who himself served in the First World War, later noted the importance of maintaining a firm underpinning in society’s structure in his book *The Historian’s Craft*. There “must be a permanent foundation in human nature and in human society, or the very names of man or society become meaningless.”89 In the First World War, this foundation of family, already the focus of intense concern, splintered further, as an entire generation of young men left “vacant chairs” in the domestic space as the war dragged on. Many identified this rift and realized that the foundation of society was threatened, its existence on the brink of “meaninglessness,” unless steps were taken to improve the connections between those at home and their soldiers. This is why the postcards mentioned at the beginning of this chapter come into focus more clearly. They all center on the image of a vacant space in the family created by war.

Letters in wartime therefore provided a recognizable link to some permanence in a destabilizing time. This need for communication was realized early in the war by the British who created their own forms of quick communiqué by issuing the British Field Service Postcard, and later by American and British social agencies with the distribution of writing paper. Evidence of their effectiveness survive in letter collections and by the numerous cultural ephemera that are studied today. Part of the secure foundation for soldiers and those left on the home front were the letters they composed to each other. This correspondence not only symbolically filled the “vacant chair,” but also linked the battle lines with the family, a necessary connection. Government and military authorities

sensed that in order to maintain the “permanent foundation” of society, and maintain morale, the domestic must be merged with the front lines. Social agencies, such as the Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. became intermingled within both spheres as they supported the military in this capacity of connecting the two. The Post Office also played a major part in this connection by addressing the need to maintain strict timeframes of mail delivery.

On this endeavor, one of the more interesting of the reforms of the mid-nineteenth century affecting the family and eventually the family in wartime was Rowland Hill’s proposal in 1839 of the Penny Postage Stamp. Hill, a British schoolteacher, wrote an extensive pamphlet outlining the beneficial economic effects of creating an affordable way to send mail. Before this, only those who were wealthy could afford correspondence through the mail system, as most often the recipient of the letter paid the postage fee or the letters were hand-delivered by servants. If you were in the lower classes, receiving mail meant, in many cases, a trip to the pawnshop to secure the necessary funds to pay for a letter from a relative. 90 There was not any regulation of postage fees, as most of the local post masters were appointed by the Crown for their commission or they purchased it from the monarchy, and they could charge whatever price they decided. The penny stamp, Hill suggested, was not only something that would increase revenue for Britain,
but allow people an affordable “means of communication with their distant friends and relations, from which they are at present barred.”  

There were many supporters of postal reform in Britain during the mid-1800s, as most understood how cheap postage not only fostered family and friendship ties but also restored family unity.  “If a letter could travel ‘unobstructed,’” Hill argued, “then the Post Office would transform into a locomotive for ethical and moral change.” Hill felt that affordable stamps would thus help reconnect family and friends who had lost touch with each other due to “marriage, apprenticeships, employment, and education.” The American government recognized a similar need for affordable mail as well. In 1847, the United States followed Britain’s lead in affordable postage and printed their first penny stamps for public use.

During the years between the introduction of the penny postage stamp and the First World War, numerous publications emerged that instructed the classes on appropriate letter writing. These included the 1855 volume of Reverend T. Cooke, The Universal Letter Writer; on New Art of Polite Correspondence, and Samuel Beeton’s Beeton’s Complete Letter Writer for Gentlemen, published by London’s Ward, Lock & Co. Both of these volumes contain examples or models of letter writing and were designed to facilitate correspondence, including such mundane things as the suggested

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91 Rowland Hill, Post Office Reform: Its Importance and Practicability,” (London:Charles Knight & Co., 1837), 67. http://archive.org/details/cihm_21617, accessed April 17, 2015. Until the penny postage stamp, most classes of people could not even afford to send or receive mail, as the postage was usually high, and paid by the addressee. Many upper class individuals utilized the franking system, allowing them the freedom to send their letters for free, thus circumnavigating payment. Middle and Lower classes were not so lucky in this respect.
92 Golden, Posting It, 47.
93 Ibid, 55.
wording of particular letters (Beeton’s) from fathers to sons, on how to propose to a woman, on seeking employment, and the appropriate letter content from men to their sweethearts.94

By 1908, letter writing had transformed into a social practice and was taught in many school settings.95 In an American textbook of that year from a business school, part of the initial instruction stated that letters were “white-winged messengers bearing communications from one person to another -written talks upon paper.” The main purpose of letter writing, it implied, was a “conversation at a distance.”96 Letters became a vital part of the person writing them, as they acted as the abstract form of direct communication between the author and another person. While a letter consists of words, it also bears the emotion and social imprint of its author, which can be detected at a distance, once the envelope is opened and the letter read.

Carol Golden noted that one of the main reasons why the early Victorians “advocated cheap postage” was to stay connected to family and friends in the ever “increasingly mobile” society.” It was their desire to hearten the “infirm father, the blind mother,” to hear from their children.97 The importance of the domestic sphere and the connections of family became ever evident in the types of mail products produced in the latter nineteenth century. Britain’s Mulready envelopes contained designs that embodied

95 The Practical Text Book Company, Practical Letter Writing A Text Book, 1908. Not much information is contained in the volume about the author or authors. On the inside cover of the book is a stamp from the Allentown, Pennsylvania American Commercial School. Notation was contained in the stamp advertising day and evening classes. The founder and president of this school was O.C. Dorney, P.S, C.P.A. This textbook was used for instruction in the various forms of letters.
96 Ibid, 7.
97 Golden, Posting it, 92.
domestic scenes on the bottom half and the images of the “global arena” on the top half. This connection of both spheres on the face of this envelope acknowledged the meaning postal reforms had to society. “The sentimental scenes of hearth and home on the lower left and right sides of the Mulready design illustrate the argument, that the Penny Post would support and strengthen familial relationships in Victorian England.”

Tying these domestic symbols to global ones in the Mulready also provided a frame for characterizing the symbolic nature of letters to the image of the “vacant chair.” Domestic and global are connected together through the Mulready, thus, we can also reason, the imagery of the “vacant chair” is connected to the front through letters.

The long-term significance, or impact, is suggested by the fact that in one year following the emergence of the Penny Postage Stamp, the social practice of letter writing “increased 112.4 percent.” Moreover, in the early 1900s, “the Union Postale Universelle” published a report with figures showing that the United States and Britain were foremost in the social practice of letter writing over any other nation. What this meant, at the beginning of the First World War, was that those on the home fronts were saved from what Golden defined as the “depth of silence.” Unlike the times of the Crusades, the soldiers leaving home to fight in the trenches were afforded the means to communicate to their loved ones and vice versa. The affordable Penny Postage Stamp and the movement of letters eliminated this abstract void of disconnect that once had fallen on families during ancient or medieval wars.

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98 Ibid, 90.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid, 154.
101 Ibid, 165.
102 Ibid, 238.
Postal reform was thus one of the most important of the many British reforms that took place during the nineteenth century. Without this reform, middle and working classes families would never have had the means in the First World War to be fully connected with their soldiers on the battlefield. This connection was strengthened by the developments described previously. When the First World War erupted, it was some of these same social reformers who had earlier been concerned about the “traditional” family who acted to bring the services of social agencies like the Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. into play. A merging between these agencies and the military grew as the war progressed. The importance in maintaining a healthy connection between the trenches and the domestic became part of their agenda. Chapter 2 will explore in depth their service in keeping the mail running between the soldiers and those left at home, because without these necessary forms of communication, the “vacant chair” may have never been filled.
CHAPTER TWO

“WRITE THAT LETTER HOME!” — WWI AND SOCIAL AGENCY

On the postcard pictured above offered by the Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) to soldiers during the First World War, the caption on the front reads, “Keeping in Touch with Home.” Embedded in the image itself, is a banner that reads “Remember to Write that Letter Home!” That message to write, to maintain a connection to the home front, is conveyed several times, a very significant fact. Further examination of the image shows soldiers bent over their pen and paper, busily writing letters. What is also relevant about this postcard, besides the messages noted, is the fact that these soldiers are situated in a place similar to a domestic space. This colorful image shows nothing of war and when viewed with the other six postcards in this set, the images present soldiers in spaces other than that of trenches (See Figures 2.2-2.7).

Instead, the images on the Y.M.C.A. postcards show soldiers causally socializing around

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a phonograph, at the movies, singing together, creating plays or skits, in an educational setting, and in a space, the Y.M.C.A. carefully structured as ‘homelike.’\textsuperscript{105}
Figure 2.4: Y.M.C.A. Postcard “Movies—Always Popular.”

Figure 2.5: Y.M.C.A. Postcard “Singing Sammies.”
Social organizations, like the Y.M.C.A., played an important role in the life of a soldier in the trenches during the First World War. Charles Hurd, in his narrative *The Compact History of the American Red Cross*, noted that in addition to the American Red Cross there were eight different American volunteer societies that “enriched their
traditions in World War I.” These included, but were not limited to: the Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A), the Young Women’s Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.), the Catholic Church’s Knights of Columbus, the Jewish Welfare Board, the Salvation Army, the Quaker group Society of Friends, the American Library Association, and the War Camp Service. In addition, to these American social agencies, the British social organizations that offered their volunteer services included, but were not limited to: The British Red Cross and Order of St. John, women volunteers groups such as the Voluntary Aid Detachments (V.A.D.s), the London association of the Y.M.C.A, and numerous church organizations. What the listing of these agencies and the images of the Y.M.C.A. postcards tell us is that, in this war, social agencies were deeply immersed in the lives of the men who were “going over the top.” The connection of the volunteer organizations to the trenches was critical to the well-being of those who were fighting, not only in assisting the wounded but also in maintaining communication links to the home front.

When postcards, similar to these noted above, were sent to those at home with the serene pictures of a “homelike” camp atmosphere, those left behind were comforted by what they saw on the card and by its receipt. These postcard images situated the soldiers in a space that seemed safe and friendly. Families could then feel assured and could imagine that their soldiers were in a place where the atrocities that were to become infamously symbolic of the First World War never took place. It is not surprising that social organizations took measures to make sure that the space of war remained hidden.

behind the images on postcards, and yet, at the same time, we wonder why they fostered such a connection between the domestic and war. The involvement of social agencies became two-fold: to assist the men while they were away from their families and to assist the military by making sure communication lines were open via the mail service. This chapter will examine numerous images and letter content that lend support to the argument that because of this dual role of social organizations in the war, they evolved into a symbolic substitute of family and community for soldiers within the structure of military camps. These relationships were made in response to the assessment of British and American governments that their presence was needed to maintain vital links of open communication to families, which were necessary for the well-being of soldiers.

Figure 2.8: Example of a British Y.M.C.A. letterhead.  
Figure 2.9: Example of the Salvation Army letterhead.
Social organizations during the First World War - much more so than government agencies - fostered one of the most important links between the civilians at home and their men by the material they produced for letter writing. Besides beautiful letterhead, (See Figures 2.8-2.9)\textsuperscript{107} the social agencies produced many types of postcards (See Figures 2.10-2.12)\textsuperscript{108} for handing out to the men on trains and in the camps. The types of letterhead produced by these social organizations are noteworthy because of the social significance they carry. Catherine Golden has pointed out in her volume \textit{Posting it: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing} that the writing revolution, which developed in the later nineteenth century spawned an assortment of manufactured ornate writing paper that ranged from the functional to fancy. What this suggested, Golden posits, was that the practice of letter writing formed a vital part of the social relationships in both business and leisure, as letter writing straddled the public and private spheres of Victorian life.\textsuperscript{109} The role of social agencies, with their manufactured letterhead specifically created for the war, aligns with Golden’s observation in that they produced the necessary materials that could allow soldiers to maintain contact with the home front, thereby continuing the “straddling” of the private space of the domestic with public space of war.

Authors of the letter-writing manuals mentioned in the Chapter 1, were not far from the truth when they insinuated that written correspondence represented “the

\textsuperscript{107} Y.M.C.A. letterhead from the British Y.M.C.A. and the America agency of the Salvation Army. In personal collection of author.

\textsuperscript{108} “The Red Triangle Goes Every Step of the Way,” Two examples of Y.M.C.A. postcards handed out to the service men as they traveled towards the war on trains and ships. In personal collection of author.

treasured mementoes of the absent.”¹¹⁰ Letters and postcards, which passed through the mail system, became the physical representation of the person who authored them and thus, by this reasoning, it is understandable why social agencies were quick to produce the kinds of postcards mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The home front needed a tangible artifact, even if it was just a piece of paper, to know that their soldier was in good health.

Figure 2.10: Y.M.C.A. preprinted postcard handed out on trains. The reverse side is a short note from John to his mother Ms. W.H. Pells in Rhode Island. John notes that their journey was “tiresome” and he “got no sleep and had to go with out (sp) break fast (sp).” He also informed her that no one knew exactly where they were headed but “rumor’s are that we go to Georgia.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid.
Figure 2.10 is a Y.M.C.A. pre-printed postcard that the Association’s representatives handed out on a train or at train stops during the first initial deployment of soldiers. Such cards were a simple and quick avenue for young men to write a short note to family of their whereabouts as they traveled through the initial stages of their training and dispatch. What is interesting about this postcard is the verbiage on its front - “The Red Triangle Goes Every Step of the Way.”\(^{111}\) The statement let the soldier know as well as the recipient of the postcard that the Y.M.C.A. was located “on troop trains, in training camps and trenches.” Hundreds of British and American “Red Triangle buildings especially adapted to the needs of men in khaki” were available for their use and membership was free. The language concludes with the urging to “write a cheerful message” on the back “to the folks at home.”\(^{112}\) The second pre-printed Y.M.C.A. postcard (See Figures 2.11 and 2.12) was adapted to hand out to those heading to sea from ports in America. In this case, there was not a blank space on the opposite side for a “cheerful message,” but pre-printed language that read: “The ship on which I sailed has

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\(^{112}\) Ibid.
arrived safely overseas.” A space afterwards was provided for a signature. Much of the language was the same as the other postcard with the exception of the last paragraph, which stated that the card was presented “by a representative of the Transportation Bureau of the National War Work Council of the Young Men’s Christian Association.”

The postcards mentioned above are relevant to this chapter’s discussion of connections, especially those fostered between the home front and the trenches through the military’s incorporation of social agencies in the trainings camps and in the vicinities of the trenches. The Y.M.C.A.’s postcards above are clear examples of the intertwined roles these social organizations had within the life of a soldier, in the military camps, and at the front. Not only were the social organizations situated in the trenches for the general well-being of the men, but they worked for the “needs of men in khaki,” needs that otherwise may have been provided by families at home. How did social agencies like the Y.M.C.A. become so involved in the military during the war? In order to understand this association, a glimpse at the history of two well-known social groups will provide a clue as to why their involvement became institutionalized in the everyday processes of a soldier’s life during the war.

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, the years before the First World War were turbulent times for the family. Many in society harbored some anxiety about the integrity of its structure. Social reform advocates, mostly from the middle classes, developed programs in society that supported the ideal family and its virtues. The Victorians

certainly had their domestic cult and in the mid-nineteenth century, these conservative middle class men and women helped to develop many new social organizations that rose to champion the plight of the family torn apart by the effects of industrialization, the dislocation caused by imperial service, and the results from the greater mobility of people.

The efforts of these social reform advocates to keep the integrity of the family structure whole became the foundation and reasoning behind the development of several of these social organizations. In particular, the history of the Young Men’s Christian Association, (Y.M.C.A.) parallels many of the social programs created in the mid-nineteenth century to stabilize families by intervening in the lives of family members. In this case, the founding members of the Y.M.C.A., in hopes of improving “the spiritual conditions” of young people, geared its social programs towards young men at first, and then later, young women. The structure of the Y.M.C.A., religious and conservative, felt that so “many unconverted” could be directed towards Christian practices that appeared to be absent in many nineteenth century families. Redirecting young people towards their organization would help re-educate the youth and thus kept them in line with traditional family values.114

The parent association for the European and American Y.M.C.A.s formed in 1844 with twelve British members, headed by George Williams, a clerk and young man from a farm in Devonshire. At this particular time, this small group functioned as a Christian

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organization for young apprentices and clerks.\textsuperscript{115} This fit well with the sentiment of British middle class, which felt that a large part of preserving a stable family environment depended on protecting the spiritual aspect of the individual. The historian Walter Houghton also observed this type of response in his volume \textit{The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870}. Houghton stressed the fact that British middle class felt a “sense of crisis” in family structure because they feared that the social ills abhorred resulted from a breakdown in the “traditional authority of the church.”\textsuperscript{116} The loss of Christian values in their eyes paralleled the loss of family stability, and the Y.M.C.A. was one of the responses that evolved to remedy the outlook.

The Young Men’s Christian Association grew in size, both in Europe and America. James Lee Ellenwood, an Association committee secretary in the early twentieth century for the state of New York, remembers in his book, \textit{Look at the “Y”!} that in its origins, the Y.M.C.A. offered dormitory rooms at modest rates and provided a place for young men to socialize and attend educational discussion groups, all this in a Christian environment.\textsuperscript{117} Even though the Y.M.C.A. had its beginnings in evangelical teachings, it soon captured a place in society as an organization that had the ability to “weave itself into the life of a boy, in town or country, school or college, in peace or war.”\textsuperscript{118} Some of the special lectures presented for the young men at general meetings included such topics as “Safety Measures” and “Relationships.”\textsuperscript{119} The most important

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 3.
\textsuperscript{117} James Lee Ellenwood, \textit{Look at the “Y”!}, (New York: Association Press, 1940), 45-46.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 65.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, 48.
\end{flushleft}
aspect of the Y.M.C.A., according to Ellenwood, was the “all-around approach” of its social programs. Here, the Y.M.C.A. focused on four teachings: 1) religion and church; 2) education; 3) home “where by intimate contact, one learns of the affections, adjustments, inter-relationships of human beings”; and 4) recreation and leisure activities.\(^{120}\) Before the First World War, the Y.M.C.A. carried within its structure, a type of interaction with its young members that exhibited a personal relationship “as intimate as the home.”\(^{121}\)

Points of connection can be drawn from the foundation principles of the Y.M.C.A. to the first set of colorful images introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The “all-around approach” of the social organization, as noted by Ellenwood, were exhibited in the captions of these postcards. The ideas of home, family, religion, education, recreation, and leisure, by insertion on objects for writing home, assured families that the same values of the home were placed in the space of war. The Y.M.C.A. filled the hands of soldiers with many items that reminded them of these elements. Evidence of this can be gleaned from a small brochure that had been handed out on the trains to American soldiers (See Figures 2.13 and 2.14).\(^{122}\)

\(^{120}\) Ibid, 86-87.  
\(^{121}\) Ibid, 89.  
Figure 2.13: Front of Y.M.C.A. brochure produced to hand out to men on the trains or in the training camps.
Evidence of the vital links between home and trenches surface in the language inserted onto this brochure. For example, the same “all-around approach” values of the Y.W.C.A. are found in a paragraph on the backside of the paper (See Figure 2.14). Here it is stated that a typical day in a Young Men’s Christian Association camp in France would include “classes in foreign languages, entertainments by local talent; athletics, checker tournaments; meetings of special groups of men; song services; sermons by a Chaplain; informal addresses and other religious exercises.”123 Included, is also a personal message from the Y.M.C.A. Chairman, Dr. John P. Munn, the words to the song

123 Ibid.
“Over There,” and the same picture from one of the Y.M.C.A. postcards mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, which shows men “learning French.”  

Another paragraph states: “In cantonments you will find that the Young Men’s Christian Association and other kindred agencies have sought to provide facilities for your comfort. The representative of the Railroad Association, who is on the train with you, will count it a privilege to meet you personally and to render any service within his power.”  

In a boxed note, situated in the center of the bottom highlighted by a dark black outline, the message advises the soldier that after he reaches his camp, he should put “this folder in the first letter you write home. Get paper and envelopes at the Y.M.C.A. nearest your barracks.”  

In all material handed out to the American soldiers, there was a constant reminder to write home. These items contained numerous statements that addressed the value of home and instructed the soldier to send, not only letters home, but also the flyer. These Y.M.C.A. items, once received by families, solidified in their minds that the war somehow resembled the domestic space, even though this imagery was erroneous and far from the truth.

The other important social organizations that found their beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century were the International Red Cross and American Red Cross. Both developed separately, but they shared equally in the task of maintaining connections between the men in the trenches and those at home. The initial stages of the Red Cross organizations began in September of 1863 during a meeting in which delegations from 16

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124 Ibid.  
125 Ibid.  
126 Ibid.
nations gathered in Geneva to discuss humanitarian needs for those in Europe who were placed in distress during times of catastrophes or conflict. This volunteer organization of middle class civilians was formed for “public benefit” and specifically for aiding civilians and soldiers during times of crisis.\(^\text{127}\) The call to organize stemmed from those who saw a need to “render aid in war” and this attitude would become the glue that bound them with the military by the time the First World War erupted.\(^\text{128}\)

Although there were American representatives at the international meeting in 1863, the United States did not become a member of the International Red Cross.\(^\text{129}\) Instead, under charter from Congress, they formed independently and this was mostly because at this time, America still grounded itself in an isolation stance from world politics. The government charge behind the charter of the American Red Cross specified the following responsibilities: “to provide services and assistance to members of the armed forces, to conduct a disaster preparedness and relief programs, and to provide other government-requested assistance in carrying out the terms of the Geneva Convention.”\(^\text{130}\)

In Britain, the counterpart to the American Red Cross was the St. John’s Ambulance Society, but eventually this developed into the British Red Cross and Order of St. John’s during the war.\(^\text{131}\) The British Red Cross’ (BRC) Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau, established by Sir Robert Cecil in 1914, became one of the more

\(^{127}\) Hurd, *The Compact History of the American Red Cross*, 15-16.

\(^{128}\) Ibid.

\(^{129}\) Ibid, 16-17.

\(^{130}\) Ibid, 7-8.

\(^{131}\) Ibid, 50.
successful organizations in cultivating the connection of home and trenches.\textsuperscript{132} British families could submit requests for information on missing soldiers and the bureau would provide them with information that stated the whereabouts of their men, even if it was a gravesite.

The American Red Cross in Washington, D.C. had an equivalent department titled the Bureau of Communication. Responses would be sent to any individual making an inquiry on a pre-printed card that could be filled out with the necessary information and then posted to the inquiring family (See Figure 2.15).\textsuperscript{133} What is interesting about this pre-printed card is that it resembles that of the Field Service Post Card put out by the British military (See Figure 2.16 -2.17).\textsuperscript{134} Both the American Bureau of Communication pre-printed card and the British Field Service Post Card used a style of printed messages that made for efficient and quick communication. The correspondence from William R. Castle, Jr. of the American Red Cross Bureau of Communication only needed a slight modification to the message already on the card, wherein Mr. Castle filled in the name of the missing soldier. He also added the date the report had been received from the Paris office. The British Field Service Post Cards were manipulated in much the same way. A soldier only had to cross out the messages he did not wish to send, put in some dates, and


\textsuperscript{133} American Red Cross Bureau of Communication pre-printed card sent to Mrs. Margaret E. Blaney on March 15, 1919. Here the card advises Mrs. Blaney that her inquiry “regarding Pvt. Frances C. Blaney,” resulted in word “from our Paris office that Headquarters reports him well and on duty on Jan. 21, 1919.”

\textsuperscript{134} An example of the British Field Service Post Card, British Military form 114/Gen No./5248 The field card was printed by S&S Ltd January 1916. In personal collection of author.
sign his name.\textsuperscript{135} The similarity of both forms speaks volumes about the connection between the Red Cross organization and its role with the military.

Figure 2.15: American Red Cross Bureau of Communication pre-printed form for inquiries. This particular card is addressed to Mrs. Margaret Blaney concerning her inquiry about Pvt. Francis Blaney

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
References to this important aspect of the Red Cross and its desire to aid those at home to find information about missing or wounded men can be found in the letters of Arthur Joseph Dease, an Irishman who volunteered to serve in the capacity of an ambulance driver during the war. Dease noted in a letter to his mother dated July 15, 1915 that his American friend Marion Lindsay had “just written me from Switzerland where she is busying finding out about French prisoners…She says she has been very successful & asks me if I have any English friends prisoner & if so she will be most
happy to do what she can to find out about them [sic].”\textsuperscript{136} In another letter dated September 8, 1915, he followed up with the information that he had received “a nice letter from Marion L. re. the Frenchman” he asked her to find and “she sent a letter from the U.S. Embassy & said Baroness von Bissing had hunted too but I regret with no result.”\textsuperscript{137} The Red Cross, in both Britain and America, became one of the foremost social agencies in locating missing soldiers and reuniting them with their loved ones by mail.

In both Britain and America, the Red Cross closely fit within the structure of the army camps, more so than the Y.M.C.A. Like the “Y,” the Red Cross maintained canteens within the camps, yet their role differed from that of the Young Men’s Christian Association in that they opened hospitals, ran ambulance services, created homes for refugees, and operated orphanages. In an interview with the Honorable Arthur Stanley, Chairman of the British Red Cross Society, which appeared in the International News Service during this period and was printed for civilians as a small booklet in 1916, the Chairman pointed out that with his direction the British Red Cross Society was responsible for the creation of Motor Ambulance Services. This service operated with the military at the front to “pick up wounded men who could not be carried to the field hospitals.”\textsuperscript{138} He also noted that one of the organization’s outstanding features was the 70,000 women “representing all classes, who are voluntarily working for the Red Cross”


\textsuperscript{137} Ibid. Letter dated September 8, 1915.

in the capacity of the Voluntary Aid Division (V.A.D.).\textsuperscript{139} It is important to note that in this interview he also mentioned that the volunteer work of the organizations was done in conjunction with the military.\textsuperscript{140}

The Red Cross, one of the key social organizations for aid during crisis, developed extensive service branches within the first years of the war. It played an important role in maintaining vital connections between families and their soldiers as well as providing for the needs of the service men. It also efficiently functioned “both as a clearinghouse for all prisoner-of-war information” and as “sort of international post office to relay mail from prisoners of war to their loved ones, and vice versa.”\textsuperscript{141} Henry Davison, Chairman of the American Red Cross War Council during the war, stated when he accepted his position that the job of the American Red Cross was to “bind up the wounds of a bleeding world.”\textsuperscript{142} The War Department worked closely with the Red Cross and the Commission of Camp Training Activities to provide recreational, educational, and religious programs which were similar to the directives of the Y.M.C.A.\textsuperscript{143}

The role of the Red Cross and other agencies during the war seemed to be that of “‘shock absorber’ between the men in uniform and the civilian population.”\textsuperscript{144} Many Red Cross members found themselves acting as mediators in assisting the men “suffering the loneliness of mass herd life,” the numerous “family problems mounting into the thousands daily because of separated households,” and most epidemically the “clothing

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, 13.
\textsuperscript{142} Hurd, \textit{The Compact History of the American Red Cross}, 145.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, 147.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, 153.
\end{footnotesize}
issues.” The Red Cross facilitated functions that would otherwise be a part of normal household routines and acted as a liaison between the space of the domestic and the space of war. As the war dragged on, their role grew larger as they were further intertwined within the structure of the military. Eric Schneider, when commenting on the British communication operations between those who were inquiring into the whereabouts of soldiers, hinted at the larger role of the British Red Cross when he insinuated that it was actually “a ‘semi-military’” operation.

Ernest P. Bicknell, the National Director of the American Red Cross also hinted at the American Red Cross role as a “semi-military” entity in his memoirs *With the Red Cross in Europe 1917-1922*, when he noted that the “War Department authorized certain ranks indicated by various military titles to be conferred upon officers and representatives of the Red Cross when working with or in close relationship to the United States or Allied Armies.” President Wilson served as the honorary President of the Red Cross during the war and on May 12, 1917 established and appointed a war council within the Red Cross structure. Although the directive from Bicknell insinuated the American Red Cross organization remained “wholly non-combatant, civilian, and humanitarian,” it still operated within the military and contained a military like hierarchy of command.

Charles Hurd made similar remarks in his history of the Red Cross about the parallelism of the American Red Cross to a military organization. “To the soldier in

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145 Ibid, 158.
148 Ibid, 5.
149 Ibid, 12.
World War I…there was no differentiation between the chapters and the National Red Cross, or even any understanding of the almost military organization and discipline to which Red Cross staff workers and volunteers gladly submitted.”150 Red Cross volunteers even wore uniforms like the army.151 The ties between the two are further evidenced by Hurd’s description of the intermingling of medical personnel and hospital units, which ran “in support of the Army’s own medical program.”152 Nurses, part of the military establishment, had “their equipment and their housing at base hospitals” supplied and oversaw by the Red Cross.153 Other services they provided, such as feeding men stuck for long hours on troop trains, was soon realized by the military to be of such importance that the army “requested the Red Cross formally” prepare to integrate itself within its framework.154 Red Cross Societies operated on all fronts and behind enemy lines “to aid the sick, the wounded, and the imprisoned,” and to provide the link between soldiers and those on the home front.155 The British Red Cross spent an amazing $90,000 a day in management of its war programs.156 One of the largest jobs the International Red Cross performed was the management of the Central Prisoners of War Agency and Central Tracing Agency, where it worked to trace civilians and military personnel alike who were lost in the confusion of the war.157

151 See frontispiece picture of the First Red Cross Commission in Ernest P. Bicknell, Vice Chairman in Charge of Insular and Foreign Operations for The American Red Cross, memoir titled *With the Red Cross in Europe 1917-1922*, (Washington, D.C.: The American National Red Cross, 1938). The Red Cross Commission wears similar uniforms to those of the men in the army.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid, 156.
155 Deming, *Heroes of the International Red Cross*, 47.
156 Ibid.
This blend between social agency and military also happened with the American Y.M.C.A. Hurd noted that the Y.M.C.A. shared in the “responsibilities and privileges” afforded the Red Cross.\(^{158}\) In a report made by Dr. John R. Mott, the general secretary for National War Work Council of the Y.M.C.A. in 1918, when appealing for new workers, described the importance of the Association as one that symbolized unification between social agency and army. “A military leader would not think of going to war without reserves,” he noted. “The Y.M.C.A. is a part of the military machine to the extent that it provides recreation and keeps up the morale of the fighting men, and the Y.M.C.A. must have reserves.”\(^{159}\) Social organizations blended their duties within that of the military ranks and immersed themselves into the roles of a “semi-military” operation, thereby linking their functions in both the domestic and war spaces.

Canteen services at the front worked as an extension of the agencies within the military camps. Field directors considered them to be a personal army that kept the connections open through the postal services. This is certainly evident by the historic fact that the BRC maintained and operated within their ranks an internal postal service during the First World War.\(^{160}\) The many divisions of the BRC needed its own mailing system, but this bureaucratic system played into the role of maintaining the infusion of mail to the trenches. Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory* noted that a British soldier’s daily routine included receiving and writing letters.\(^{161}\) More importantly, he noted that the “postal connection between home and the trenches was so rapid and

\(^{158}\) Hurd, *The Compact History of the American Red Cross*, 170.


\(^{160}\) Schneider, “Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau,” 301.

efficient” that most letters or parcels only took about 2 to 4 days to travel from England to the mud of the battlefields. Unfortunately for American soldiers, because of their distance from home, receipt of letters was not as efficient and many men went for weeks or months without seeing any correspondence.

Bicknell noted in one of letters in his memoirs, how bad the postal service was by 1918 even for those in the American Red Cross. Volunteers experienced terrible delays and many missing pieces of correspondence.

Not a word has reached me from Le Harve since I left. The mail service here is intolerable. Much mail does not get through at all, and all is greatly delayed. Major Barden tells me that Mrs. Barden numbers her letters to him and that he received her number one, then no more for several months until number fifteen arrived. He has never received the missing ones. Miss Gladwin estimates that fully half the letters do not come at all. I suggest that when you write me, you sent the original in one envelope and a copy in another several days later.

Yet, though the midst of these difficulties the Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. continued to strive to keep the connections between soldiers and home open as best they could.

Y.M.C.A. secretaries were available to help any soldier who wanted to write home. In the letter of October 30, 1918 to his sweetheart, Arabella, Sam Riggins wrote the following about the Y.M.C.A.: “I will give you the three sentences that has been used most by the boys over here. Here they are. I love you, don’t marry and pray for me. A Y.M.C.A. Secretary said that the three above sentences had been used more than any other three by

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163 Bicknell, With the Red Cross In Europe, 182.
the boys over here.” 164 In order to know this information, it would mean that this particular Y.M.C.A. Secretary had assisted in constructing many letters to the home front.

American newspapers from the period also contain reports of the heroic achievements of volunteers who did extraordinary things in order to maintain postal ties, even at their peril. For example an article in the New York Times dated June 24, 1918, bore the title “Hun Flier Attacks Y.M.C.A.: Riddles Automobile Canteen Carrying Supplies to Soldiers.” In the article, the journalist related the harrowing experience of a Y.M.C.A. canteen automobile and its driver as an enemy plane chased him down a road. “The rapid shifts of open warfare,” writes the journalist, “make it impossible to establish permanent post exchanges” so they follow the troops and many times come “under fire.” 165 Another article in October write of injuries Y.M.C.A. workers suffered from shrapnel as they supplied “its men at the front with hot chocolate, cigarettes, and writing paper.” 166 The act of maintaining a link through the canteens is evident also in the letters of some soldiers. Coningsby Dawson, a Canadian officer, noted in a letter dated October 18, 1916 to his sister that after coming down from the front lines while he was sitting in his dug-out he received mail carried in by one of the canteen volunteers. Family “letters from Montreal reached me yesterday,” he wrote. “They came up in the water-cart when

164 Sam Riggins letter to Arabella Smith, October 30, 1918. In personal collection of Dr. Ruth Looper, Young Harris College.
we’d all begun to despair of mail.”167 Bertram Cox, a Canadian Gunner mentioned in his letter to his brother Carl and sister-in-law that the Y.M.C.A. offered concerts at the training camps. “You have no idea what the people will do for soldiers” he remarked.168 This included getting the mail through.

The total merger of the social agencies within the realm of war was evident in the desire of volunteers to maintain a presence in the space of the trenches. None of these volunteers were at safe distances from the actual fighting and routinely performed remarkable feats in order to be the link between the soldier and those at home. They often risked their lives to maintain this essential connection. In this capacity, the growth of these social agencies in the years during the war and afterwards can be measured by the eventual volume of mail handled in 1944. During the Second World War, approximately 50 to 100 thousand types of communication or correspondence moved per day and 31 data-processing machines electronically sorted millions of cards of data.169

Thus, this paper comes full circle to the Y.M.C.A. postcards first mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and the messages to write. While it may have seemed odd that the set of postcards displayed the “all-around approach” of the Y.M.C.A. principles, especially since these postcards, unlike letters, carried few, if any, actual details of the war, they nonetheless served the same important functions. These cards helped to carry an essence of sensibility into a time of turmoil through their images of the overlaid spaces of domestic and war. In this respect they carried forward into the trenches the memories

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169 Deming, *Heros of the International Red Cross*, 58.
of home for those soldiers who wrote on them and assured those back home that their men were comforted by others, whether Y.M.C.A. or Red Cross, when they themselves could not be the comforter for their separated family member.

The merging of the social agencies within the framework of the military also guaranteed that soldiers would not be left without certain community support mechanisms. The social reform movements that started in the nineteenth century and created the beginnings of these agencies thus witnessed the blossoming of these agencies as they fully came into their own with the eruption of war. Even though some of these organizations had their roots in the neighborhoods where many soldiers grew up, they and their programs followed them to the battlefield. The immersion of these social agencies into the space of war was facilitated by their place within the structure of the military. This connection, beneficial to both the military and the soldiers, greatly enhanced their ability to administrate to the needs of the men. In this way, the activities and interventions for which these social organizations were already well known continued in the trenches for these young men just as if they were still back at home.
CHAPTER THREE

THE VALUE OF LETTERS

“Received your very voluminous mail of various dates and was certainly glad to hear from you as we think more of a letter from the states than we do of a good meal, and this is going some in the army.” Private Jim Kane to his wife.170

There is no argument that before today’s technological advances in correspondence via electronic means, handwritten letters were an enormously important form of communication. Handwritten letters were essential in keeping channels of communication open among family members in the later nineteenth and into the twentieth century. As the quote above suggests, to soldiers letters from home were more highly valued than a “good meal.” During the First World War, letters were symbolic. They formed a concrete link to those on the home front. For families left behind the bits of paper with the splotched ink and dirt replaced the emptiness and silence of the “vacant chair” in the family circle. Letter writing became a kind of “intrinsically personal act” a valid confirmation of “the ties that bind.”171 As Catherine Golden has stated, correspondence became the principal medium for weaving together community and connecting family to their soldiers.172 Therefore, it is no wonder that the frequent requests from soldiers at the front was for letters from home.

Tammy Proctor commented in her book Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918 that the “lively correspondence that moved between battlefront and homes demonstrated

170 Letter from James Kane to Helen McGeary, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania dated November 23, 1917.
the strong ties that conscripted soldiers and volunteers felt with their civilian family and friends.”173 There is no doubt that letters were both a symbolic representation of their author and a binding mechanism between home and war. This link is ever apparent in the letters from soldiers during the war and Proctor even supports this bridge when she noted the numerous ways civilians at home devised various means to maintain connections by establishing writing clubs within private charities and promoting public writing campaigns. Those at home realized the vital necessity of letters and they knew how important the writing was to the soldiers in the trenches.174 This essential relationship can be documented by both traditional and digital applications of research.

When Paul Fussell stated that any historian “would err badly who relied on letters for factual testimony about the war,” his words referred to the difficulty some men found in describing the war itself.175 How would we understand the truth about the war if it had been censored away? His observation did not take in account the many letters discovered after the war in the hands of family members or left hidden in shoeboxes that did pass the censor, or were even written by officers who were to censor themselves and never did. Contrary to his observation, there are many pieces of correspondence that can be read in contemporary times that did more than give the “clichés of the conventional phlegmatic letter.”176 There are numerous letters, whether in private collections or in print, which contain truthful descriptions of war events that those at home would have considered horrific and unnerving. Letters such as these were often printed after the war, such as

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176 Ibid.
those in the volume *War Letters of Fallen Englishmen*, an edited collection that Laurence Housman began in 1930.

What this tells us is that new collections of letters are still surfacing that can be explored and studied. These letters may provide new details or offer new information about soldiers’ experiences in the First World War, and may provide additional evidence and documentation of the connection to the domestic space and its importance to the men in the trenches. With the discovery of new letter collections and new digital research methods, can we determine if the historical questions about the First World War have been thoroughly answered? Or if historians would “err badly” if they relied on these newly discovered collections for additional testimony to add to the historical discussion concerning this war?

When Paul Fussell constructed his famous volume, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, it was written in 1975, 40 years before the coming of the age of the digital and its applications. Perhaps there is still evidence that can be uncovered within these letters if both traditional and digital research is utilized jointly. It does not necessarily have to be a written statement that is extracted from the investigation. It can be evidence gathered about letter content such as graphs of word choices, images documented on postcards, and words that are contained in the correspondence rearranged in quantitative measures like a word cloud. Letters in today’s technological world hold much more “factual testimony” than many realize, especially concerning the link between the space of war and the domestic.
With the help of digital text analysis, along with traditional assessment of text, this chapter will examine the words written in soldiers’ letters in such a way that patterns can be detected in the author’s word use. The resulting data would assist in solidifying the assertion that letters held symbolic meaning and at the same time a concrete connection between the home front and trenches. By transcribing handwritten letters and dumping the transcribed text into a text analysis program such as Voyant-tools.org, hidden patterns might be extracted that would otherwise go unnoticed. While this form of text analysis by digital means is a new and exploratory technique, it certainly can provide corroborating evidence that can be paired with traditional methods of research, especially in dealing with large numbers of handwritten letters. Besides a traditional investigation of the handwritten word, a multi-dimensional viewpoint can be gathered by the study of the author’s word uses through graphing of word trends and the use of word clouds, and then, taking these small bits of testimony to compare and contrast against other collections possibly providing new evidence or opening the door for new historical questions.

This chapter aims to provide two things: first, a traditional examination of several letter collections and second, a comparison and contrast of these same collections with the incorporation of the digital tool as a supporting mechanism for the evidence found. The product of this examination will show the importance of letters in war not just as a linkage between trench and home, but as a symbolic apparatus that filled the void left in the community and family circle in the absence of men during conflict. This investigation will argue that letters written during war carry a different meaning than usually thought.
Quotes or passages in this chapter surface from various sources. Most of the research though, is based on several unpublished WWI letter collections. These include the letters of: Private Chester Cole from Berlin, Massachusetts; Corporal Sam Riggins of Liberty, South Carolina; Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, born in Barbados and emigrated to Canada; and Arthur Joseph Dease, an Irishman who served as a volunteer ambulance driver with the French Red Cross. Other collections used in this chapter include the 1918 published letter collection of the Canadian Officer Coningsby Dawson in *Carry On: Letters in War Time*, the letters published in *War Letters of a Public School Boy - Paul Jones*, and the 1930 collection *War Letters of Fallen Englishmen*, compiled and edited by Laurence Housman. I distinguish here between the published and unpublished letters as this is an important aspect of the research. This difference will pertain to the quantitative measures constructed and produced by the digital text analysis and will be addressed within the contrast and comparison of these collections, especially when seeking to find within the words a reference to the domestic space.

The most common and obvious similarities, which all of the above collections incorporate, is the fact that each of these men experienced war, and then, within their letters, make reference to letter writing or the receipt of letters during this experience. They also experienced separation, particularly separation from family and community, and the act of communication via letters or postcards eased this separation. This characteristic is found in most of the correspondence. For example, Sam Riggins in his letter of November 10, 1917 to his future wife, Arabella Smith, stated:

> We boys get together and crack walnuts and hickory nuts for pass time [sic] it is pretty lonesome sometimes up here,
so you see, we have something to keep off the blues. Just a word from you will assist in keeping them off, any time, if you have not got time to write much I will appreciate a short letter but rather have a long one. Please write soon.177

Sam expressed his need to hear from those at home to help ease his “blues” while he was separated from those he loved. The letters soothed his feelings of being “lonesome.” In another letter to Arabella dated May 25, 1918, he urged her for more letters, “I do not want you to wait for [an] answer from your letters then but write as often as you can. I will appreciate every letter that you write to me.”178

Another young American soldier from Missouri, Doyle Burkhardt, wrote to his parents on September 16, 1918 of his feelings about his separation from family:

Well I am writing today because this is our last liberty until we come back & might be our last chance to mail a letter. So I will send this letter a shore [sic]. Well they [sic] Boys are playing the Missouri Waltz on the Victrola & it sure sound lonesome. But not home sick I never get home sick Because [sic] I know it would not do no good.179

Doyle wanted to make sure that he sent his family a piece of correspondence because he suspected that it may be his “last chance to mail a letter.” He knew they would be worried if they did not hear from him.

Many soldiers would spend time in front of a small candle while they were in the trenches or on guard duty constructing a message home knowing their families were waiting for a handwritten letter. Coningsby Dawson mentioned in his correspondence, dated July 27, 1916, that his letter would arrive to his parents when they were “horribly

177 Sam Riggins letter to Arabella Smith, November 10, 1917. In personal collection of Dr. Ruth Looper, Young Harris College.
179 Doyle Burkhardt letter to his parents, September 16, 1918. In personal collection of author.
lonely.”¹⁸⁰ Paul Jones lamented in a letter dated August 5, 1915 to his parents that he had not previously had time to sit down and “write a letter home.” His traveling at the front left him “no time for anything but hasty postcards.”¹⁸¹ Likewise, soldiers anticipated mail from home. Chester Cole, in a letter dated August 11, 1918 to his parents from ‘Somewhere in France,’ wrote that on “August seventh I got three letters. One from you dated July 2nd, one from Aunt Ethel and one from Arline Woodbury. They all went to Camp Johnson first. We ought to get some more mail before very long. Please write as often as you can and tell every one [sic] else to write.”¹⁸² Arthur Dease requested his mother address his parcels to “Lieutenant A.D.” because for military men, he noted, the mail seemed to come quicker than for volunteers.¹⁸³ Regardless of status, most men operating within the structure of the battlefield needed this connection to home.

The above passages are only a small sampling from the vast quantities of correspondence produced during the First World War. It only represents a “drop in the bucket” of soldiers’ correspondence and a tiny fraction of their requests that those at home not forget them and send letters. However, these examples open a door to the relationship between home and battlefield in the words of soldiers themselves. What can we know about the letters and their authors from these words? What can be determined

¹⁸² Chester Cole letter to his parents, August 11, 1918. In personal collection of author.
by examining these collections and what can they tell us about the associations between home front and trenches?

Jay Winter observed in his introduction to the 2002 reprint of War Letters of Fallen Englishmen that this particular volume of letters “did not speak for the (British) nation as a whole or for the army as a whole” because it only contained a small mixture of letters, most of these from one particular social status.\(^{184}\) This could be said for any collection studied from the First World War. Not one collection would speak for all, but rather their place in the vast millions, when studied, would allow a glimpse at the great contrast in language. For the collections examined in this chapter, differences existed about the authors of these letters in terms of: social class, nationality, religion, etc. and there are certainly wide variances of language or the degree of education in these writings. When all of these factors are studied together though, a picture develops about letter writing in war and about the tie between community and their soldiers.

The importance of letter writing in war is certainly evidenced not only by the content of soldiers’ letters but also by the numerous cultural artifacts produced during that time that use the word “letter” itself in some form or fashion. Examples of artifacts include song titles, poetry, the images on postcards, and actual photos of men holding letters to their breasts that were souvenir mementos of the war. Songs such as *Is There a Letter for Me* by Chas. K. Harris, *Take a Letter To My Daddy “Over There”* by Roger Lewis and Bobby Crawford, and *Three Wonderful Letters From Home* by Joe Goodwin and Ballard MacDonald all contain in their titles the word “letter” or “letters.” The lyrics

\(^{184}\) War Letters of Fallen Englishmen, v.
also reflect messages to those at home that soldiers were expecting letters. In the song *Is There a Letter for Me*, the first stanza reads:

Somewhere in France there’s a lonesome young lad  
Wearing his heart away, 
Watching the Mailman with sad hungry eyes, 
For letters to brighten his way.\(^{185}\)

Likewise, from the song *Take a Letter To My Daddy “Over There:”*

The boy was mighty lonesome, since his dad had gone away,  
He whispered to the mailman, when he called the other day:  
Take a letter to my daddy over there,  
Tell him that each night for him I say a pray’r  
He’s a soldier brave and true,  
Tell him, “God will bless him,” too.\(^{186}\)

And lastly, from the song *Three Wonderful Letters From Home:*

Three letters left a village bound for somewhere over there,  
Three letters to a lonesome soldier lad. 
Each one a loving story told,  
Each one was worth its weight in gold.\(^{187}\)  
Three messages that made his poor heart glad.

What is also interesting about these lyrics is the common use of the word “lonesome.” Sam Riggins and Doyle Burkhardt used the same word in their letters. Doyle spoke of the sound of the music playing on the Victrola as being “lonesome.” Perhaps this word “lonesome” was structured within the songs to remind those at home how far away and absent their soldiers were at this time. Coupled with the word “letters” it certainly was a

\(^{185}\) Chas. K. Harris, *Is there a Letter for Me*, (New York: Chas. K. Harris, 1918).  
suggestive reminder that members of the family needed to remedy that lonesomeness by writing.

Other artifacts created during this time offer similar suggestive messages. Postcards many times displayed messages to write. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Y.M.C.A. offered them to soldiers on trains and handed them out at the training camps, urging soldiers to send them home to their families. Postcard companies did a thriving business during wartime and employed artists to create beautiful illustrations that carried subtle messages within the colorful art (See Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Decorative Victorian-style greeting cards, like the one produced in Figures 3.3 and 3.4, likewise contained hints about letter writing. This particular British greeting card had an insert with a poem titled “A Love Letter” and on the cover is a picture of a soldier with a letter on his knee. As he lit his pipe, he looks up and in the top corner is a woman, (who is supposedly in his thoughts - perhaps his sweetheart) and she clasps a letter against her left shoulder, on the same side as her heart. On a British postcard, a poem titled “I’m Thinking of You Everyday” at Purfleet Camp - A Soldier’s Letter, takes up most of the card along with a picture of a British soldier in front of the British flag. The poem, situated as more of a letter to the recipient, begins with the lines: “I haven’t had time to

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sit down and write, And thought perhaps you might grieve; So I send you this card just to say I’m alright, and longing to see you again when on ‘leave.’” (See Figure 3.5).190


190 “I’m Thinking of YOU Everyday.” At Purfleet Camp. A Soldier’s Letter. (Brighton: Benton & Co.). Postcard was sent to Mrs. Hill from her son Frank with the message: “Dear Mum, Just a line to say I arrived back quite safe, I hope you will like this card with love from Frank.” Postmarked the 24th of April, 1916. In personal collection of author.

Figure 3.5: “I’m Thinking of YOU Everyday.” At Purfleet Camp. A Soldier’s Letter. (Brighton: Benton & Co.) Postcard sent to Mrs. Hill from her son Frank. Post marked 24th of April, 1916.
Several groups on the home front organized in order to minister to the soldiers who were feeling “lonesome.” Tammy Procter stated that many women within the belligerent countries joined humanitarian organizations to provide voluntary services such as writing letters to soldiers.\(^{191}\) She also mentioned that one “unusual program” in France, which started early in the war, utilized “marraines de querre (war godmothers).” These women adopted soldiers at the front who may have been “lonesome” and provided comfort to them by way of letters.\(^{192}\) This was not the only organization in the combatant areas though that attended to the soldiers by providing a “sense of connection with home.” Part of the Red Cross’s activities during Christmas was to send out parcels to “lonesome” soldiers who might not have otherwise received Christmas packages.\(^{193}\)

Not hearing from home affected the general well being of soldiers. Many felt that no letters meant they personally had lapsed from memory and forgotten by family and friends. This sentiment and emotion is another common element found in soldiers’ letters. In correspondence dated March 29, 1918, Jim Kane of the American Graves Registry Service wrote his wife Helen: “Have just received your letter of February 28, and you can believe me it certainly was welcome, as I had not heard from you for about three weeks, and I was beginning to think you had forgotten me altogether.”\(^{194}\) Private Chester Cole similarly wrote to his parents, “Remember me to everybody and tell them to write.”\(^{195}\) Private Thomas Reese wrote on March 28, 1919 to his uncle, “The Folks [sic] back in the States can’t realize how welcome a letter is to the doughboy, three thousand miles away

\(^{191}\) Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War*, 98.

\(^{192}\) Ibid.

\(^{193}\) Ibid.

\(^{194}\) Jim Kane letter to his wife Helen, March 29, 1918. In personal collection of author.

\(^{195}\) Chester Cole letter to his parents, August 11, 1918. In personal collection of author.
from home and in a different country than what we are used to.” 196 Sam Riggins in a letter to Arabella dated May 29, 1919, written on American Red Cross No. 51 Debarkation Hospital letterhead, stated that he attributed his nervous breakdown to the fact that he had not received mail for several months. “Think that it was caused mostly by my not being able to hear from you and have very often have not heard [sic] from home now since long before I heard from you last.” 197 Even Arthur Dease, a British volunteer in the French Red Cross became concerned about the slow receipt of letters. He wrote his mother on November 20, 1915 that he had “no news from you since I arrived here.” 198 He had gone nine days without a piece of mail and this was certainly unusual for him as France was in near proximity to Britain.

This connection to home was a constant concern for those serving in the trenches. It balanced them between the space of war and home, keeping them grounded in their families and communities while they served in the turmoil of the battlefield. Letters meant that home was still accessible and not lost in some fissure that swallowed up family and community, much like the destruction of French villages by the big guns. Letters from soldiers contain numerous examples of requests for continued correspondence from family and friends. While this particular aspect is a predominant characteristic within these collections, there are also stark differences too.

The first variation we can see between these collections and their authors is in the socioeconomic backgrounds of these particular men. While the letter collections

197 Sam Riggins letter to Arabella Smith, May 29, 1919. In personal collection of Dr. Ruth Looper, Young Harris College.
examined in this chapter are both American and British, they also include a diverse mixture of social class and nationality. The two published volumes, authored by British citizen Paul Jones and Canadian Coningsby Dawson, contain sections written by their fathers who provided detailed background information on their sons’ education and prior life. W.J. Dawson, Coningsby’s father, noted within the first paragraphs of his introduction to his son’s letters that he “graduated with honours in history from Oxford in 1905.” He mentioned also that he marveled at the fact that his son “fresh from a brilliant career at the greatest of English Universities” could have been content in the simple life in Taunton, Massachusetts after they emigrated to America. Likewise, Henry Jones, Paul Jones’ father, provided many details about his son’s life before the war in his introduction to *War Letters of a Public-School Boy*. He noted that Paul had “won numerous prizes at Brightlands for Classics, English, French, General Knowledge, Reading, Athletics, and was almost invariably top of his form.” In 1908, he recalled, Paul entered Dulwich College and in 1909 “won a Junior Scholarship” and in “1912 a Senior Scholarship of the same nature,” and that he was an athlete and captain of the school’s Football team. From such details, it is evident that Coningsby Dawson and Paul Jones were part of the upper class of society.

Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, born 1894 in the British West Indies on the island of Barbados, on the other hand, came from middle class society. After his education, he migrated to Canada in 1913 and worked as a teller for the Canadian Bank of Commerce.

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In 1916, he enlisted in the Canadian army as a Gunner and after the war moved to the United States to work at the General Motors Corporation.\textsuperscript{202} His collection of letters are currently published on a family website and were not professionally published during the war or even afterwards.

Arthur Dease was born in 1871 in Celbridge, County Kildare, Ireland. He was the son of Colonel Sir Gerald Richard Dease. His education was at Downside, a Catholic private school in Somerset, England. He traveled widely, some of his destinations including Canada, the United States, South America, New Zealand, and Australia. While his employment was not elaborated on, when the war started, Arthur was 42 years old, too old for military service. Therefore, his only recourse was to join a voluntary organization like the Red Cross so that he could offer his assistance in the capacity as a volunteer ambulance driver.\textsuperscript{203} As with Gunner Cox, Arthur Dease’s letters were not published professionally during the war either. This collection was later purchased at an auction and published by a local historian on the internet. The information provided by this local historian placed his background somewhere between middle and upper class.

When America entered the First World War, Corporal Sam Riggins was a resident of Liberty, South Carolina, a small rural town on the outskirts of Greenville. According to the 1940 census records, Sam completed tenth grade and in that year (1940) was working as a sales representative for a local lumber company.\textsuperscript{204} Private Chester Cole

\textsuperscript{203} Batten, \textit{World War I Letters Home From the Western Front and Edwardian Era Letters, 1892 - 1920, “Family Background.”}
was a young man from Berlin, Massachusetts, a rural community. The 1940 census records noted that Chester was a farmer and carpenter and had completed all four years of high school but had no advanced education afterwards. Both of these letter collections were unpublished and remained within the family or privately held.

The six collections of letters noted above provide a sampling of diverse social and national backgrounds. Two of the letter collections were published during the time of the war, two were published on the web during contemporary times by either a family member or a local historian, and two have not been published at all. These differences play an important part in understanding how digital applications of research and investigation supplements traditional modes of study and will be further discussed later in this chapter.

First, through, a separate assessment of the published volumes of letters should be made. It must be noted that the volumes of letters that were printed during the war may have had a specific purpose behind their publication and this is particularly evident because of the lack of reference towards the domestic space within the letters themselves. It could be argued that the introduction of these two volumes into society supported some particular political agenda. For example, if a publication of the Red Cross in Oregon during the war is used as a comparison, this small volume, which contained letters, but rather a sampling of letters from the state’s young men who were “over there,” was

http://1940census.archives.gov/search/?search.state=SC&search.enumeration_district=23-89#filename=m-t0627-03814-00193.tif&name=23-89&type=image&state=SC&index=42&pages=54&bm_all_text=Bookmark

distributed in such a way as to advertise for donations. Titled *Letters from Oregon Boys in France* and published in 1918, the book contains a foreword in the first couple of pages from Woodrow Wilson dated December 4, 1917, in which the President declared:

> Let there be no misunderstanding. Our present and immediate task is to win the war and nothing shall turn us aside from it until it is accomplished. Every power and resource we possess, whether of men or money or of materials, is being devoted and will continue to be devoted to that purpose until it is achieved.\(^{206}\)

There is also an endorsement from Oregon’s Governor in 1918, James Withycombe. Within the Governor’s letter, he says, “I sincerely trust that your booklet will meet with a ready sale and that the Red Cross will profit through your patriotic effort.”\(^{207}\) Both statements indicate the purpose of this publication.

The volume itself contains letters written by soldiers but it is hard to discern what type of social class or background the authors of the letters came from. Many of the letters seem to include rehearsed words for giving to humanitarian causes or support for the war. In one particular letter, Morris Dargan wrote to his sister that she should send money to the Red Cross and they “will get it to the people who are really in need of it and they will make it buy things those people actually need.”\(^{208}\) In another letter from Sergeant Conroy to his mother, the Sergeant noted that he had begun to invest in a $200 Liberty bond that he would eventually send home and he added that every “American soldier in France has one or more” and that “General Pershing asked that each soldier


\(^{207}\) Ibid, 7.

\(^{208}\) Ibid, 32.
subscribe.”209 The selection of letters contained in this booklet therefore obviously weaves together propaganda and the rhetoric of the social agency, the message being that the people of the state should support the Red Cross, buy liberty bonds, and assist the war effort.

This type of association between propaganda and rhetoric, and wartime programs was also incorporated within the published volumes of Dawson and Jones. There is a veiled suggestiveness within the frame of the books that the publication of the letters was made for purposes other than that of posterity, even though it had been stated at the beginning of each book that there had never been any intent to publically print the private letters. In fact, Coningsby’s father noted in his introduction that the “general point of view in these letters is, I think, adequately expressed in the phrase “carry on.”210 The term “carry on” was a British phrase that represented the need to keep going even in the face of adversity. When this volume was published in 1918, England had already been at war for four years and morale was low. The need to persuade the population to “carry on” with the war had to develop from somewhere in the trenches. This idea to use a soldier’s collection of letters sent home to family might have come from the publishing agency or even from a politician’s office. Within the letters, written from someone like an officer, propaganda could be intertwined with his everyday kinds of statements. This would make it seem truthful and the public would be unsuspecting.

In Carry On this purpose is evident. For example, Coningsby remarked in a letter to his sister about one of Lloyd George’s speeches that he was “all with him.” He added

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209 Ibid, 36.
210 Dawson, Carry On, 13.
that no “matter what the cost and how many of us have to give our lives, this War must be so finished that war may be forever at an end.”\textsuperscript{211} At the end of this small published collection of letters (it only spans from the third quarter of 1916 to the first quarter of 1917), he remarks to his sister in a letter dated February 6, 1917, that he read that America might enter the war. “Somewhere deep down in my heart I’ve felt a sadness ever since I’ve been out here, at America’s lack of gallantry - it’s so easy to find excuses for not climbing to Calvary; sacrifice was always too noble to be sensible.”\textsuperscript{212} He complains further of America’s lack of war enthusiasm - this ironically shortly before America’s entry into the war - of the “ninety millions whose sluggish blood was not stirred by the call of duty” and that they would soon die as a nation as “all coward civilizations have died, unless she accepts the stigmata of sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{213} As this book was published both in London and in New York by the John Lane Company, those reading his letters would also be Americans and it is hard not to imagine the emotional response his words might have elicited from American men. Thus, is it not difficult to conclude that the purpose behind his book was to arouse a very different response from the American nation?

Similarly to Dawson’s book, the published volume of letters from Paul Jones contain many political sections of a propaganda nature. Jones’ father noted at the beginning of the memoir section of the book (Paul was killed in battle July 31, 1917) that his son had written in a letter to his brother that he was glad to be involved in the war as it made him “realize what a petty thing life is.”\textsuperscript{214} Henry Jones further expounds on

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{211} Ibid, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Ibid, 130-131.
\item \textsuperscript{213} Ibid, 131.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Jones, \textit{War Letters of a Public School Boy}, 4.
\end{itemize}
British chivalry and particularly his son’s bravery by noting that nothing “was finer in the first months of the war than the rally of the manhood of Great Britain to the call of the country in its time of need.” He elaborates on this theme with the additional comment that no sections of the country answered the call to serve more so “than the athletes and scholars from our public schools and universities.”

This published volume also contains letters that are thematic of political issues of the time. The beginning to the second part of this book, which incorporates the letters Paul Jones wrote during his involvement in the war, commence with several pieces of correspondence that address certain politically charged topics in Britain. The very first letter, for example, dated May 15, 1915 touches upon the issue of expelling or imprisoning German citizens within Britain. “Personally I think we ought to take stern action in regard to the internment of all Germans in this country.” He continues with an assessment of British policy towards Germany by observing that in order to “crush the Germans we must put every ounce into the struggle.” This particular portion of the correspondence concludes with his criticism of Parliament for its “disgraceful line on the question of drink.” (This was an issue about outlawing the use of alcohol during the time of war, especially for soldiers.) The other two letters in this section dated June 6, 1915 and July 19, 1915 read much the same and could quite have been selections from a political journal. In fact, in the last part of the July letter he addresses economics and war. “Don’t imagine that economics end war,” he wrote. “To win a war, in ninety-nine cases

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216 Ibid, 169.
217 Ibid.
out of a hundred, you have to beat the enemy’s forces decisively in the field and put large bodies of his troops permanently out of action.”218 The rest of Jones’ letters in later chapters read very differently from these first three. The reader cannot fail to miss the variance in word use and tone. It opens the door to question as to the authenticity of the authorship of the first three and if these were added to the publication for other reasons.

In contrast to what is found in Jones’ published collection of letters, Arthur Dease’s correspondence does not delve much into political reflection. In fact, most of his letters to his mother and sister contain descriptions of his ambulance cars, his movement with the troops, driving conditions in the dark while transporting the sick and wounded, the receipt of his packages, the rate of his family’s investments, and so forth. In contrast to Dawson and Jones, Dease’s letters maintain a sort of listing of his weekly activities with the French Red Cross Ambulance Service and his concerns about things at home.

“One can hear the guns here,” Arthur wrote February 18, 1915. “Should have gone on today, but 2 cars being repaired & in this zone one must all travel together.”219 In another letter dated March 1, he described his feelings about his work.

I was not at all sure how it would affect me at first, some people of course can’t stand this work & seeing the wounded & dead, & all under such very weird conditions. Somehow it has no effect on me & I was, I confess, surprised! Some quite unconscious & moaning away, fearfully wounded, slightly wounded so patient & grateful for any little help; we took 2 stretcher cases & 3 sitting down in our car & started off to village 3 miles off & 2 others who had gone ahead were waiting on us.220

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218 Ibid, 176-177.
Arthur’s letters do include some brief discussion of political moments. One such example is his reference to the Head Master of Eton School’s speech that had been posted in the Paris Daily Mail and how “premature” it was to discuss peace, especially since he had not seen what the “Germans have done to this country.” In the next sentence, he quickly turns back, however, to his volunteer life and to his friend Will’s recovery, ending with his hope that he would not “get called up tonight.”

Likewise, Bertram Cox’s letters describe his everyday experiences. In a letter of September 24, 1916 to his sisters Ina, Mabel, Hellen, and Ella, he wrote of his arrival in England.

We went from the boat on to the train and were allowed to get off, and have something to eat at Birmingham, passed through “Oxford” and struck Milford station at 4 AM next morning. The trains are nothing like the ones in U.S. and Canada, very small, 4 seats facing each other, no sleepers, but very fast. We then had to walk over to Witley Camp, about 1.5 miles some walk with all these kit bags (2), overcoat, rain coat, bandolier, water bottle, haversack. We are in huts, 1 to a subsection (4 subs to a batter) ours is ‘c’, about 30 men, this gives lots of room with a table in the center.

In another letter, dated December 18, 1917, when he was finally at the trenches, he wrote to his sister Mabel and brother-in-law, Carl of his day’s activities and thanked them for a package:

I’ve just jumped out of a very hot bath and as this room is none too warm (YMCA) I’m shivering, but must write you tonight to thank you so much for the nice box of candy, and Carl’s letter received last week. It was “great stuff” and

221  Ibid, Arthur Dease letter to his mother dated April 1, 1915.
Herbert’s was exactly the same. I’m sure all the gun crew thanks you. It came when I was at the guns. This week I’m at the wagon lines and we’re having a good time with the drivers.\textsuperscript{223}

The majority of Cox’s letters are very similar to those of Dease and do not contain much political comment, focusing more on his excitement of receiving news of home. “I had long letters from NY and also from home this week,” he wrote his brother and sister-in-law, “with all the accounts of the wedding ‘a big time was had.’ So you see, you’re the only one of the family that has treated me in this uncalled for manner, but I’ll forgive you if you write me a nice long letter.”\textsuperscript{224}

The same is found within the unpublished letter collections of Sam Riggins and Chester Cole. The connection to home was important to both of these men and more references to this space appear in the content of their letters than talk of war. Sam’s letters to Arabella contain numerous requests that she continue to write him every day. In one letter, he assured her that his “blues” were not “worrying” him so much because he “got many letters today.”\textsuperscript{225} Chester similarly told his mother to “write when you can” and ended by saying, “tell pa I will be home to help him soon if I get the furlough.”\textsuperscript{226} Much as was the case with Arthur Dease and Bertram Cox, letters played an important role in these soldiers’ daily experiences amidst their daily routine. The act of writing a letter, or receiving one, was interwoven within the well-being of these men, especially when so far from home. Yet, this type of authentic connection to home does not appear

\textsuperscript{223} Ibid, Bertram Cox letter to Mabel and Carl dated December 18, 1917
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid, Bertram Cox letter to his brother Murrill and his sister-in-law Ella dated November 14, 1917.
\textsuperscript{225} Sam Riggins letter to Arabella Smith, January 24, 1918. In personal collection of Dr. Ruth Looper, Young Harris College.
\textsuperscript{226} Chester Cole letter to his parents, May 13, 1918. In personal collection of author.
much in the two published collections of letters. Rarely is there a request for letters from home, the acknowledgement of the receipt of family letters surface occasionally, but the true telling of these differences is the lack of Dawson and Jones’ thoughts of home. So much of the two men’s published letters connect to the rhetoric and politics of war and any reference to the domestic space seems to have been downplayed or eliminated.

The ability to measure quantitatively the connection to home found in the letters, or the lack thereof, by the use of word or data mining techniques lends further verification to what has already been uncovered by traditional research methods and discussed in this chapter. Voyant-tools.org has the capacity to measure and catalog word use and word count, specifically pulling out words such as “home” and “war.” A visual product, or visual evidence, can be produced about each of the letter collections that offer data, which corroborates what is found in the text content. For example, when the transcribed text of each letter collection is placed into the digital application, the visible word clouds produced for each contain measurable differences and similarities (See Figures 3.6-3.11).  

Figure 3.6: Word cloud of Coningsby Dawson’s letters. http://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=1457463295766.9100&stopList=stop.en.taporware.txt

Figure 3.7: Word cloud of Paul Jones’ letters. http://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=1457486669870.5743&stopList=stop.en.taporware.txt
Figure 3.8: Word cloud of Arthur Dease’s letters. http://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=1457485864260.6986&stopList=stop.en.taporware.txt

Figure 3.9: Word cloud of Bertram Cox’s letters. http://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=1457486226530.7166&stopList=1457486438161ih
Figure 3.10: Word cloud of Sam Riggins’ letters. http://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=1425831231150.5903&stopList=stop.en.taporware.txt

Figure 3.11: Word cloud of Chester Cole’s letters. http://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=1457399330649.4202&stopList=stop.en.taporware.txt
Not surprising is the fact that Paul Jones’ word cloud (Figure 3.7) verifies the strong connection this published letter collection holds to war. The word “war” was the most used word in his letters and therefore the largest word in the word cloud. What this represents is visual evidence that this volume was perhaps an artifact of propaganda and this is why there is not much word use of “home” or “letter.” This observation is documented by the fact that there is no visible representation of words associated with the home front, with the exception of the mention of his school, Dulwich. In fact, words that do appear, like “cavalry,” “British,” “horses,” “army,” and “military,” contrast greatly to those found in Sam Riggins or Chester Cole’s word clouds (Figures 3.10-3.11).

Coningsby Dawson’s word cloud (Figure 3.6) contains the word “war” also and while his word cloud contain a different assortment than that of Jones’, the words associated with the battlefield tend to be larger than words associated with the home front or the word “letter.” There is also a noticeable absence of the word “home” in Dawson’s word cloud thereby supporting the argument that these published versions stripped away references to the domestic space. The word “war” does appear in Bertram Cox’s word cloud (Figure 3.9), but it is smaller than the words “letter,” and seems to carry the same weight as the word “write.” The word “war” appears in Arthur Dease’s word cloud (Figure 3.8) but it is also smaller than the words “home,” “course,” “night,” “cars,” and “wounded.” The most obvious omission of the word “war” is in the word clouds of Sam Riggins and Chester Cole. In these two American letter collections, “write” and “letters” seem to be the most important things to them during their experience in war.
This connection, or lack of it, to the home front can be assessed in word graphs too. By graphing the differences in the use of the word “war,” or “home,” the two spaces discussed in this chapter, distinct patterns emerge from these six collections. One of the first noticeable contrasting measures between the collections is the noted differences in the raw frequencies of the authors’ use of the two words. For instance, both Dawson (Figures 3.12-3.13) and Jones’ (Figures 3.14-3.15) word graphs show that the word “home” was utilized in the letters less frequently than the word “war” and as the letters progressed in the war, “home” appears to decline in frequency whereas the use of “war” increases. This validates the decline of a link to the domestic space.

Figures 3.12-3.13: Raw frequencies of the words ‘home’ and ‘war’ Coningby Dawson’s letters. Letters range from the third quarter of 1916 to the first quarter of 1917.
Contrary to these published works, the unpublished letter collections (Figures 3.16-3.23) provide a less-edited assessment of the true connection that existed between men and their homes. This essential link is replicated in the measurable outcomes of the graphs provided. For example, Chester Cole’s graphs (Figures 3.22-3.23) show his use of the word “home” was more frequent than his use of the word “war.” The same could be said for Sam Riggins (Figures 3.20-3.21). While the word “war” was used in his letters during the first quarter of 1918, more so than “home,” this immediately changed the next quarter and diminished as the war progressed, while his reference to “home” increased. Arthur Dease’s graphs (Figures 3.16-3.17) parallel this quantifiable outcome too. “Home” was mentioned much more than “war.”

Stefan Sinclair and Geoffrey Rockwell, “Cirrus,” Voyant, http://voyant-tools.org/tool/Cirrus. The same URL links previously noted under the word clouds will apply to the word graph data obtained for each individual letter collection.
Figures 3.16-3.17: Raw frequencies of the words ‘home’ and ‘war’ Arthur Dease’s letters. Letters range from the 1st quarter 1915 to the fourth quarter 1918.

Figures 3.18-3.19: Raw frequencies of the words ‘home’ and ‘war’ Bertram Cox’s letters. Letters range from 1916 to 1919. These were grouped by year instead of by quarter due to graph output and the jagged appearance of the product outcome.
Figures 3.20-3.21: Raw frequencies of the words ‘home’ and ‘war’ Sam Riggins’ letters. Letters range from the 4th quarter of 1917 to the fourth quarter of 1918.

Figures 3.22-3.23: Raw frequencies of the words ‘home’ and ‘war’ Chester Cole’s letters. Letters range from the 1st quarter of 1918 to the third quarter of 1919.

So what does this data tells us? Coupling this method of digital research with that of traditional modes, it allows quantifiable evidence to support the statement that letters were a symbolic link to home and this abstract bridge between home and trenches is
corroborated through this type of digital application. Through the analysis of the visual product of the graphs, obtained from the words written within the space of letters, the connection of home is more pronounced and document the fact that the word “home” was used more frequently than the word “war” in unpublished letter collections. What this type of quantifiable evidence also shows is that relying on published letters during the time of war did not provide an authentic assessment of the everyday soldier and his experiences. The use of the educated and upper class British officer to express the war experiences was lop-sided and did not accurately portray the true essence of the everyday military man, whether he was British, Canadian, American, etc. Home was more important to the men than the war. This fact is captured through the use of the digital tool by creating the word clouds and word graphs that visually display the evidence. It adds a visual message that reinforces traditional modes of research discussed in the beginning of this chapter.

Now, a new door is opened to possible new explorations and historical questions. Why is there such a contrast in the graphs? Why did the published volumes strip away the connection to the domestic space? Why does the word ‘war’ disappear gradually through the social classes when viewed through the lens of the word cloud? A hint to possible answers may begin with an observation made by Allison Booth in Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space between Modernism & the First World War. In her discussion of the apparent misrepresentations of ideas and language that existed between the trenches and the space in the noncombatant places, she states that there were many things that never “filtered” back towards the home front. “First of all, nobody wanted to
hear it,” she wrote. “Superiors listening to reports of their subordinates wanted good news and affirmation that strategies were sound ones. Civilians listening to their stories of combatants wanted optimism and affirmation…”

Unpublished letter collections sat in the boxes and storage places of family members after the war was over and some are just now finding a new audience 100 years after their author penned them. If letters were to be published during the war, they were construed in such a way as to mobilize the populace or express the “optimism and affirmation” about the war. What is derived from examining the unpublished letter collections discussed in this chapter is the simple fact that the majority of those men sitting in the dirt and mud of the trenches desired nothing more than letters from home and “home.” Those letters published during the war point towards the fact that publishers or even social agencies, like the Red Cross, edited content to sway public opinion towards a specific purpose. Can we rely on the testimony in published volumes to provide a clear picture about the feelings men held concerning their need to be connected to family and home? I think this answer would be no.

As new collections surface, and even if we delve into some that have been archived, finding a true sense of the value of handwritten letters and “home” will come from these unpublished sets of letters. There has been no editing when transcribing them for investigation and the words are authentic, as well as the author’s tone, emotions, and desires. By combining this type of traditional research with digital tools, word patterns,

hidden in the depths of the letters can be extracted to provide a visual assessment of the collections. These products may add to the historical discussion of artifacts from the First World War and substantiate that soldiers were always, even in the midst of war, connected to their community and their families.
CONCLUSION

My own beloved wife - I do not know how to start this letter. The circumstances are different from any under which I ever wrote before. I am not to post it but will leave it in my pocket, if anything happens to me someone will perhaps post it. We are going over the top this afternoon and only God in Heaven knows who will come out of it alive.....

Oh! How I love you all and as I sit here waiting I wonder what you are doing at home. I must not do that. It is hard enough sitting waiting. We may move at any minute. When this reaches you for me there will be no more war, only eternal peace and waiting for you.

It is a legacy of struggle for you but God will look after you and we shall meet again when there will be no more parting. I am to write no more sweetheart...Kiss the Bairns for me once more. I dare not think of them my Darlings.

Goodbye, you best of women and best of wives, my beloved sweetheart. May God in his mercy look over you and bless you all...May he in that same mercy preserve me today.

Eternal love from Yours evermore. Jim xxxxxxxx
July 20, 1918 Sergeant-Major James Milne to his wife

The connections of family, set in the turmoil of war, in the wider framework of progress during the nineteenth and early twentieth century offer a view of how the image of Reid Mitchell’s “vacant chair” became very emblematic of this time. This image is sort of a cue, a suggestion that during the nineteenth century social discontent existed about the stability of family in the wake of industrialization. This image also hints at a relationship that appears to be disrupted during the years of change caused by industrialization and then further fractured by the separation of soldier and family in the First World War. Many members of society, particularly those in the middle class,

viewed industrialization as a force that adversely affected family connections and war only intensified it. Even Mitchell noted that family and community was the “glue that kept the soldiers together.”231

The disruption from both industrialization and war in the sphere of the domestic created many “vacant chairs” in the family circle. The emptiness of the space in war is evident by some of the numbers of those killed during this time - 908,371 in British households and 116,516 in American homes.232 Letters from home to those who were at a distance were a bridge that strengthened the severed ties from community and symbolically represented those who were absent. These letters became even more important to those at home who never saw their men return. To them, the letters were a tangible artifact to keep in place of those they lost.

To make sense of how important “family” is to the structure of society the historiography of social concerns for the family, as it was affected by industrialization, focuses attention more so on how the image of the “vacant chair” becomes associated with letter writing in war. As mentioned in Chapter 1 even before the twentieth century there existed anxiety about the integrity of the family unit and its stability. Industrialization in Europe had shifted populations from the rural towards the confined spaces of urban life and the search for work for others forced many to immigrate across the globe. In America, this move of population happened when new lands were open in the frontier and moving out west meant new opportunity. All of these changes affected

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the family by severing bonds and ties as family members moved in the shadow of the changing times, breaking from the older tradition of large family groupings, to a more defined nuclear family unit of father, mother, and children. Support mechanisms of the extended family were reshaped under the umbrella of industrialization, and grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc., were no longer a part of the immediate space of the nuclear family.

There were many in society’s middle class, both in Britain and in America, who viewed this loss of the old world agrarian community as the first sign of trouble for civilization. They believed that industrialization had created a vacuum in the family structure, negatively fracturing the core of civilized society. Members who broke away from this communal family sphere left empty spaces in the home. Self-appointed reformers, which consisted of that part of society’s genteel “social-purity advocates, clerical crusaders, philanthropic volunteers, social scientists, feminists, medical and legal professionals” advocated for monitoring the relationships in the family as they feared that the reshaping of the family in this way meant social disintegration. Some of these reformers “began to speak of a ‘crisis of the family’” because they observed noticeable changes in the family sphere, which they deemed harmful to individual members in the family and intervened with new types of social agencies geared towards nurturing the needs of the domestic.\textsuperscript{233} This perceived crisis was soon burdened further with the outbreak of the First World War. Families endured sorrows and heartbreak, as some of the “vacant chairs” in the domestic space was never filled again.

When the War erupted in 1914, the loss of a whole generation of men in Europe only added to the stress already placed on the family structure by the events of Industrialization. The war consumed the unit of family and forced its members into situations of great strain, as these members struggle to maintain unity in the face of conflict. The discord of war further disrupted the integrity of a family circle as children living close to the front lines in France were moved to safe areas to protect them. Ernest Bicknell, an American who was the Vice Chairman in Charge of Insular and Foreign Operations for the American Red Cross, noted in his memoirs, that conditions were difficult for adults and even harder for the children. “In many households the absence of the father at war and the mother at work produced a disintegration of family life which bore heavily upon the younger members.” In trying to save children, the attempts of social agencies, such as the Red Cross, to move the little ones out of harm’s way broke apart the family. The children, relocated to makeshift children’s homes, Red Cross camps, or orphanages, became some of the first refugees and were some of the ones to endure the lasting effects of family disintegration due to war. The stability of their home life disappeared, as they no longer had parents to nurture or shelter them.

Other social agencies that involved themselves in the care of the family in the mid-1800s, continued their programs into the First World War. The formation of the Young Men’s Christian Association began in England as a way for young men living alone to have access to fellowship within the Christian faith. The Y.M.C.A. created a home away from home for those who were working in the midst of the large cities and

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did not have the support mechanisms of their families. The purpose of the Y.M.C.A. was
evident in their programs that aimed to keep youth away from activities that could lead
them down the wrong path. This thought process was a product of the assumption that
youth away from families created generations of juvenile delinquents. They continued
their support of the young men in the trenches during the war by providing a haven for
them during the chaos. Much of their intervention in the space of war was just the
continued social programs already in place in community neighborhoods before the war.

Additionally, the Y.W.C.A. developed in much the same respect. During 1914,
the Y.W.C.A. was instrumental in providing assistance to those forced to migrate because
of the war. They organized an international conference to discuss and address the issues
concerning the displacement of women and children. Their concerns centered on the
destabilization of Europe’s families and these issues eventually became a wider legacy of
the First World War, as the members of the Y.W.C.A. continually sought answers to
questions of how to contend with the “moral and social risks that faced divided families”
in the aftermath of the war.235 While the “evacuation of children from war zones” during
the First World War did not create a great deal of alarm at this point in history, “the
extended absence of mobilized fathers generated a wave of anxiety about juvenile
delinquency.”236 This consequence of war created a continuous form of instability that
moved through the interwar years and into the 1940s conflict of the Second World War.

235 Tara Zahra, The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families after World War II, (Cambridge:
236 Ibid.
Vacant spaces consistently remained in the sphere of the family and it was harder to mend the broken domestic space.

The constant core of society is the family. Yet conflict can convolute this stability by erasing the permanent lines and boundaries of the family structure. This destabilization of the family, viewed with anxiety in the nineteenth century, was solidified by the event of the First World War. Bicknell’s observation of the programs to remove European children from the war zone and the effects it had on the members of the family provide clues as to why social interventions that started in the nineteenth century continued during this time of war. While some of these social programs may not have always succeeded, there are lasting legacies from many of them as they strived to maintain family connections. The Red Cross is firmly set within the structure of the military to aid the soldier during his time of separation from his family - even in today’s conflicts.

So we must ask how this social concern for family fits together with the absence of the soldier during war and letter writing? How does the image of Mitchell’s “vacant chair” connect to letters written during conflict? Letter writing for the multitudes evolved as part of social reform in the nineteenth century. Rowland Hill, the advocate for the penny post made the assertion that families needed to maintain connection during the turmoil of mass population movement. Affordable mail would eliminate the possibility that a “poor young man in the Manchester Mills” would revolt against the “British Status
Quo” if he was able to communicate with his family.237 Here in this assertion is all three elements: social reform, letter writing, and family stability. What this statement tells us about the mentality of those in the nineteenth century is that some of those who advocated for reform understood the vital connection of family and the need to maintain the connection, even if it was through a letter. Communication between the members of society’s core element, the family, kept society intact, even in chaos.

It was only natural that the act of letter writing became an instrument to link these separated members of a family together. The numerous letters, postcards, the British Field Service Card, the pre-printed postcards of the Red Cross, and even the illustrated postcards from the Young Men’s Christian Association became ways of connection for the separated and symbolically filled the “vacant chair.” These items also took on added meaning, as they became representations of the soldiers who sent them, especially if those soldiers never returned home. Letters were a very important representation of the person writing them. As Catherine Golden noted letters are ‘material memories.’238 Therefore, it can be concluded that during war, letters from soldiers take on the role of symbolic representation of the person constructing them. They form a bridge to the family left behind and vice versa, thereby emblematically filling the image of the “vacant chair.” The handwritten letter becomes more important to members of the family because it was something they could tangibly hold until their soldier came home.

238 Ibid, 6.
This assessment is even more obvious when applying the applications of digital tools in data mining the handwritten letters of soldiers. While the published letters held a tendency to connect to the battlefield through words associated with war itself, the most authentic, letter collections of soldiers contain words closely associated with the space of the domestic. Frequently, the word “write” and “letter” are embedded, perhaps subconsciously, in the handwritten words. Even the word “home” outshines the word “war” in the unpublished letters studied in Chapter 3. With the proliferation of social agency letterhead distributed to the soldiers on the trains, in the military camps, and on the front lines, it was easy to access home by way of correspondence. Letters written to, and received from home grounded the soldiers to their family and communities. Mitchell even stated that the “strongest claim that home had on a soldier was his family.”

In concluding this investigation, it should be pointed out there was perhaps a more obvious reason to the symbolism of letters written during war. Allyson Booth, when talking about the spaces of death, pointed out in Postcards from the Trenches that many families in England were left in turmoil when the British government decided that deceased soldiers were not to be shipped back home for burial. This decision affected the communities’ normal ritual of mourning. How were these families to heal without the process of a funeral - one of the natural steps in the grieving process? To look at this decision, which affected many countries involved in the war, it now brings home how

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239 Reid, The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home, 34.
important letters would become to those who never saw their men return to fill the
“vacant chair.” It makes sense if we think about the concept of a soldier’s last letter,
which was kept private within his pocket for a comrade to mail in the event of his death.
Without a corpse to bury, the last letter had to take the place and essence of the author
back to his loved ones. That last letter became a symbolic artifact that not only filled the
“vacant chair,” but also replaced the body in death. It became physical evidence of the
person that had once lived in the family domestic space and an object that bridged home
with the grave, filling the empty space of the “vacant chair.”
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