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## A Snapshot of War: First World War Postcards from the Cedar Falls Historical Society

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A SNAPSHOT OF WAR: FIRST WORLD WAR POSTCARDS FROM THE CEDAR FALLS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A Thesis Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors

James Alexander Schmitt  
University of Northern Iowa  
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This Study by: James Schmitt

Entitled: A Snapshot of War: First World War Postcards From the Cedar Falls Historical Society

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation University

Honors

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## **Body**

The war to end all wars—that was the hope many had in early 1914, as the sounds of war began to ring louder. Four years later, and after millions of lives lost and maimed, the cataclysmic Great War had come to an end. For many young men who had left home to find adventure, serve with friends, or join in patriotic fervor, their service was at an end. As the years passed on, and the veterans passed away, what remained behind were mementos of what became christened the First World War. These created media included postcards, many of which have been saved by the Cedar Falls Historical Society, for over 55 years.<sup>1</sup> The postcards that are in the collection offered troops a quick way to communicate back home—even when time constraints prevented a more thorough letter.

## **Historiography**

In order to understand the messages and postcard types created one must dive into the historiography of postcards. To get acclimated to postcards, it is best to understand how other experts approach the topic. Irene Guenther, Professor at the University of Houston, surveyed the postcards and sketches of Otto Schubert, a World War I German veteran, and his contributions to the field of trench art and art history. Schubert's postcards helped soldiers communicate back home to loved ones and helped them cope with the intense violence. Though his artwork after his release from the military reveal the true destruction wrought by war, his postcards show an idyllic-view, one where war is absent. He self-censored his personal postcards for Irma, his sweetheart and first wife, not wishing to frighten her with what he truly experienced. His

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<sup>1</sup> “Dig Deeper,” History, Cedar Falls Historical Society, accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www.cfhistory.org/dig-deeper>.

sketches after his service more actively exposed what he witnessed, the carnage and death inflicted on the landscape around him. In the greater context of the First World War, Guenther looked at how different German artists navigated through the conflict and reflected it in their work. She also examined the development of postcards throughout the conflict and all together, she uses this to place Schubert in the context of German artists who served in the First World War.<sup>2</sup>

Expanding to a broader subject group Mike Robinson, Professor of Cultural Heritage at Nottingham Trent University, tackled how German real photographic postcards shaped the memory of World War I for German wartime veterans. He examines postcards as part of “souveniring,” where these postcards were formed of pictures specifically taken at moments of time chosen by the German soldier. They were often of peaceful and scenic times, a contrast to the darkness of the battlefield in which they occupied. These served as a way to not only process what they experienced, but to communicate a select experience to the recipient of the postcard. In the wake of immense violence and propaganda painting them as villains these postcards were to help the soldiers come to terms with what they witnessed.<sup>3</sup>

From the perspective of Canadian soldiers serving in the Entente armies Ian McCulloch, military historian and Director of the Centre for National Security Studies, focused on postcards as a progressive narrative of the conflict. Early war postcards sent by Canadian troops focused on rallying the troops, showing scenes of Canadian troops heading off to war. The most sent postcard was government issued, fill-in-the blank style. They came with pre-made responses

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<sup>2</sup> Irene Guenther, *Postcards from the Trenches: A German Soldier's Testimony of the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/lib/rodlibrary-ebooks/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=5517290>.

<sup>3</sup> Mike Robinson, “Mementos of a Dark Journey: German ‘Real Photographic Postcards’ and the Making of Memory,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 27 (2015): 104–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24739834>.

printed on the cards for ease of use for troops. This regimented, prefabricated style could help in providing a quick update on the status of the soldier to their family. As the war progressed and the destructiveness of the conflict became more apparent, troops started using more comical, satirical cards to cope with the stressors of war. These were available to troops when they were sent on leave, away from the near-omnipresence of death and mud.<sup>4</sup>

From a governmental perspective Joachim Bürgschwentner, historian at the City Archive/City Museum in Innsbruck, Austria, tackled the role of state-run production picture postcards in the Austro-Hungarian Empire throughout the duration of the war. He found that the postcards in Austria-Hungary did not contain overtly pro-war messages, but focused more on war relief. Instead of relying on caricatures of their enemies, trying to create an atmosphere of fear, the postcards were more curated to the public. They were to foster a positive image of the war, and to inspire citizens to mobilize for war. The decision for this design came from government officials, who needed to continue to provide troops and funds for Austria-Hungary's military machine.<sup>5</sup>

Taking a broad overview of World War I postcards Guus de Vries, historian from Oosterbeek, Netherlands, inspected the immense diversity of postcards and answered questions about reality, emotions and perceptions, artistic styles and manipulating public opinion. Using the body of postcards he had access to, the messages written by the soldiers did not differ much from one another, that they either contained messages of gratitude, comfort, or good health. With a mix of photo-produced, mass-printed, and handcrafted, these postcards proved to be a valuable

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<sup>4</sup> Ian McCulloch, "The Postcard War," *Beaver* 78, no. 2 (1998): 4-6, <https://search-ebsohost-com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=498326&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>5</sup> Joachim Bürgschwentner, "War Relief, Patriotism and Art: The State-Run Production of Picture Postcards in Austria 1914–1918," *Austrian Studies* 21 (2013): 99–120, <https://doi.org/10.5699/austrianstudies.21.2013.0099>.

medium to shape the perspective that people had of World War I. The variety there meant no single postcard was ever truly alike, with each serving its own little function.<sup>6</sup>

Using the Leonard A. Lauder Postcard Archive from the Museum of Fine Arts Boston Anna Jozefacka, Adjunct Professor at Hunter College and art historian, analyzed postcards from a propagandist standpoint. The postcards in the collection used patriotic imagery, real or imaginary success, and dehumanization of their enemies to drum up war support. This shaped the views of recipients of the cards, drumming up support along with other patriotic initiatives. The cards showcased in the work are but a small fraction of the vast postcard collection, with a vast quantity of Leonard A. Lauder's collection digitized for public view. The collection spans multiple nations, with cards from those on the Entente and Central Powers side. For the cards highlighted, they were highly illustrated works, with nationalistic, pro-war messaging. It often focused the superiority of their forces over that of their enemies. Caricatures and stereotypes were used, dehumanizing the opposition while inflating their own status and strength.<sup>7</sup>

Allyson Booth, Assistant Professor at the United States Naval Academy, examines the intersection between World War I and modernism with respect to what was recorded and shaped the world that came after. Concerning postcards, they played a role in providing what the author describes as a "corpseless view" of the war. In this perspective, the viscera of the battlefield is absent in the medium. Death is not directly confronted, but instead is circumvented, with an absence of the state or lack of state of the fallen relative. This played an influence on how

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<sup>6</sup> Guus de Vries, *The Great War Through Picture Postcards* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books Limited, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Anna Jozefacka, *The Propaganda Front: Postcards From the Era of World Wars: the Leonard A. Lauder Postcard Archive* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2017), 65-114.



ordinary citizens viewed the ongoing conflict absent from the battlefield itself, the size of which is still debated.<sup>8</sup>

In her article Amanda Clydesdale, archivist, deals with the preservation of postcards specifically recovered from the sunken German cruiser Karlsruhe. All the postcards recovered were unused, and varied in content. Some contained an image of a small warfleet and others contained more intimate, personal images such as children and wounded soldiers. All were mass produced prints, most likely for sailors' usage but instead remained entombed for decades as the Karlsruhe slipped beneath the surface at Scapa Flow. She talked about the effort and methods used in recovering and restoring these bundles of cards that had not been seen by man since the end of World War One.<sup>9</sup>

Bohdan Kordan, Professor at the University of Saskatchewan, goes into how postcards provide a snapshot into places that most do not have direct access to. When words could not convey what was seen, the postcard's image filled that void. Postcards provided the recipient with an image of the surrounding landscape. His selection comes from pre-war Austria-Hungary and Ukraine, showing beautiful landscapes and structures that had not been touched by war. The postcards provide a visual record of a land that had not seen war, where the storms of war had not yet struck. Though time had passed, and the view may no longer exist one could "travel in time" and gaze into a snapshot of the past.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Allyson Booth, *Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space Between Modernism and the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 21-49, ProQuest Ebook Central. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/lib/rodlibrary-ebooks/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=272494>.

<sup>9</sup> Amanda Clydesdale, "Postcards from Scapa Flow: Developing a Conservation Strategy for Material Recovered from SMS Karlsruhe," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 26, no. 1 (2005): 87-104, doi:10.1080/00039810500047508.

<sup>10</sup> Bohdan S. Kordan, "Wish You Were Here," *Queen's Quarterly* 117, no. 4 (2010): 544-553, [https://link-gale-com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/apps/doc/A248821095/AONE?u=uni\\_rodit&sid=googleScholar&xid=9e637223](https://link-gale-com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/apps/doc/A248821095/AONE?u=uni_rodit&sid=googleScholar&xid=9e637223).

Margarita de Orellana, Mexican historian, publisher, and editor of *Artes de México* and others explored the impact postcards had in Mexico, and how the medium's power transcends the image. They discuss the moments they capture, truths that are often overlooked, and how they can shape a reality that is divorced from the "flesh and blood," more specifically the portrayal of women. The postcard selection ranges from buildings, to groups of people, to individuals, often "staged" than in the moment. Postcards are not limited in what purpose they serve, it all comes down to those who send them out. These cards provide an important window into a world that has passed on and historians today can glean information from them. Though time separates the viewer from the card subject, conclusions can still be drawn from the postcards themselves.<sup>11</sup>

This thesis will primarily have an Iowa focus, serving to expand existing literature on postcards by providing a local lens. The First World War collection at the Cedar Falls Historical Society has various folders filled with letters, cards, certificates, newspaper clippings, curios and articles. It even contains German currency from the era brought home by an American Expeditionary Force soldier. There is so much to draw on that one could write several papers on the various items housed in the collection. Yet the focus here is on the postcards, of which only a few shall be highlighted. The reason these postcards are important is because they serve as a way to keep families of soldiers informed of their status when time proved too short to write letters.

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<sup>11</sup>Margarita de Orellana, Michelle Suderman, Gloria Fraser Giffords, Susan Toomey Frost, Francisco Montellano, John Page, Marta Turok, et al, "Postcards," *Artes de México*, no. 48 (1999): 65–80, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24312954>.

## **Methodology**

In order to analyze the postcards a method had to be created in order to gather evidence and draw conclusions. I began by identifying postcard collections. After looking at some potential collections online, my thesis advisor suggested that I get in contact with the Cedar Falls Historical Society. Once there, I scoured through the collection to identify postcards and noted anything that particularly to be either interesting or could serve in the analysis of the postcards there. In the collection I identified fifteen postcards that were dated to 1918 to 1919 and took photographs of them in order to view them at a later period. I also took note of the letters also present in the collection, to have a better understanding of what communication for soldiers to their homes looked like when given ample time and paper to write.

I also had sub-questions, to help guide the analysis of the cards identified in the collection. I considered types of postcards most commonly found in the Cedar Falls Historical Society's World War I Collection. I considered whether they were hand-produced, intimate cards similar to those created by soldiers in the frontline or governmental/private entity, mass-manufactured cards. Did they use photo-realistic, or colored reproductions of photographs? Of the postcards present in the collection, the ones that were most abundant were those produced by machinery, cobbled together in order to serve a propagandistic purpose. I questioned why these were so common in the collection?

After collecting the cards, I split them into two categories based on whether they had any form of writing, whether written or printed. Eleven of the cards in the collection contained some sort of personal identification connected to a soldier and recipient. I then examined the cards themselves to see if they had any form of picture or illustration on them, and if they did, I determined whether it was a reproduction of a photograph, illustration, or colorized photograph. I

also took note if the cards came with their own captions or if they had the name of the producer on it.

I once again took the cards, this time that had writing on them to compare the content that the sender wrote on the card versus letters from those in the Cedar Falls Historical Society. For example, in a letter dated April 14, 1918, Reuben H. Miller wrote of how he still was the acting staff sergeant, a trip to Dodge City and his experiences not covered in his previous letter.<sup>12</sup> The letters helped provide a context on what the general messages that letters contained, in order to compare it to postcards which have a limited space

## **Evidence**

The eleven postcards that contained writing, often a short message back home and a promise of writing a more detailed letter. Since postcards offered little space, there was not much room for the copious amounts of detail a normal letter provided. Letters had various pages of information to dole out the size of the postcard limited what could be written down.

The first postcard to be discussed at length is from Chuck Rafferty, a soldier serving in the American Expeditionary Force postmarked April 19, 1919. On the side opposite of the writing is an illustration with six figures near the foreground with a car and a horse with a seventh figure in what appears to be black in the background looking away. Behind the people and all around is the ruins of what appears to be a village. There is a caption on the photo near the top left, Vigneulles, a commune in France. Of the six main figures in the foreground there is one that gives a clue to the nationality of the figures in the foreground. The soldier on the right side of the group on top of the horse is wearing a spiked helmet, reminiscent of the Pickelhaube worn

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<sup>12</sup> Reuben H. Miller to Folks, Letter, April 14, 1918, Series XIV Military Affairs WWI Iowa & Cedar Falls Box 2.1a Reuben H. Miller Correspondence 1917-1918 2015.0031.001, Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

by German troops in the early years of the First World War. The side with the writing reveals the identity of the company who produced the card, Kunst - u. Verlagsanstalt Schaar & Dathe, Komme.-Ges, a, Akt., Trier. For the message, he asked the recipient to send an article that talks about him and jokingly asked if Cedar Falls still existed. This is because he had not gotten a letter in a while.<sup>13</sup>

The next postcard to be discussed at length is one from Elizabeth Louis, a nurse attached to the American Expeditionary Force in France. The postcard portrays two young women, in what appears to be puritan-like clothing sitting on a well. On the left side, an older man with white in his beard appears to be speaking to them. Captioned *174 Le vieux conteur au puits*, the old storyteller at the well, it conveys a conversation where the two young women, who are listening intently, are beholding the tales the old man is distributing, whilst with stick in hand and large bloomers covering his bottom half. One could imagine that this man is recalling his adventures in the wild, navigating deserts and fierce jungles during his youth. On the lower left is more printed writing, *Artaud et Nozais, Nantes*, which details who produced the postcard, Artaud and Nozais, and the location of the company, Nantes, France. In handwriting, she left a note, for the recipient of the card, that the locals of Brest dress that way in Breston costumes. The backside of the card is a short summation of her experience in France. She had endured many hardships and had nearly lost her life from an undisclosed malady. She mentions that she would do any nursing that she could for a while. She detailed more of her experiences in an

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<sup>13</sup> Knust- u. Verlagsanstalt Schaar & Dathe, Komm.-Ges. A. Akt., Trier. "Vigneulles," circa 1914-1920, CFHS Series XIV Military Affairs Box 2a World War I Iconography, Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

accompanying letter, which delved more into her life in France as a nurse with the American Expeditionary Force.<sup>14</sup>

The next postcard is void of any pictures and is blank except for pre-written responses, with blanks left to fill in the relevant information. This card is from John H. Evely, a private in the American Expeditionary Force. One side contains information for name and address. The recipient of this card is his father, Henry Evely, who is from Route #7 in Waterloo, Iowa. On the other side is the date he sent the card, February 4, 1919 as well as a blank for a greeting, his location, organization, and state of health. At the time he sent the card, he was in good health whilst stationed in Houdelaincourt, Meuse, France. Evely was part of the Headquarter Detachment of the 176th Infantry Brigade, part of the 88th Infantry Division. The card with its fill-in blanks and prerecorded sections enabled troops to rapidly respond to their families of their status whilst not divulging much in the way of information. This was in accordance with wartime censors, which did not want to divulge information that proved critical to the war effort. With the armistice coming months before there was not much action to face, mostly guard duty, as the question of Germany's future was hammered out at Versailles.<sup>15</sup>

The next several postcards covered in this collection come from the collection of Reuben H. Miller, which includes many letters with several postcards as well. It serves as a chronological account to Miller and his location, up until his return back to the United States after his service overseas. The earliest of these cards is postmarked May 31, 1918, with its front adorned with most likely an illustration or colorized photograph of an American First World War Camp. Its

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<sup>14</sup> Artaud et Nozais, Nantes, "174 Le vieux conteur au puits," circa 1914-1920, Series XIV Box 2 Folder 4 WWI Navy Base Hospital, AEF, Frances Correspondence, Louis, Elizabeth, Nurse, Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

<sup>15</sup> United States, "American Expeditionary Force Fill-In-Blank Postcard," circa 1914-1920, Series XIV Box 2 Folder 11 WWI 175th Inf. Brigade, 88th Inf. Div. Correspondence, Evely, John. H., Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

caption reads *General Camp View*, and shows myriads of tents, horses, wagons, and one-story buildings running down the middle of the camp in a parallel line. It passed the wartime censor in Washington, with it deemed that no war critical information could be gleaned from its publication. On the reverse side the publisher is printed out, Sackett & Wilhelms Corporation from New York and Brooklyn. This side is covered in writing, as Miller believes he would have little time to write in the future the letters he penned. He told his folks that he arrived at his destination safe and he will struggle to write letters in the future as often due to time constraints. He is currently attached to the Co C. 313 Supply Train in Chicago and wishes for his laundry to be sent as soon as possible.<sup>16</sup>

The next card to be covered is postmarked June 2, 1918. The frontside contains a colorized image of a few barracks at Camp Dodge, Iowa. The full caption reads, *Barracks and Street Scene, Camp Dodge, Iowa*, and shows soldiers milling around outside two barracks. Some men are sitting while others are standing, with them huddled together in groups. On the other side, it contains the name of the publisher, Enos B. Hunt. He mentions to his folks how he did not have a lot of time to write to them the usual letter and used the postcard to let them know he was ok. He hoped that he could write to them tomorrow.<sup>17</sup>

Postmarked June 3, 1918, one day after the next day after the previous card, is captioned *Camp Street, showing Barracks, Camp Dodge, Iowa*, and is a colorized image. It shows soldiers standing with rifles at side during what appears to be an inspection whilst other troops stand off to the side. There are about four or five barracks in the background behind the troops in the

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<sup>16</sup> Sackett & Wilhelms Corp, "General Camp View, Series No, 24, 222661," circa 1914-1920. Series XIV Military Affairs WWI Iowa & Cedar Falls Box 2.1a Reuben H. Miller Correspondence 1917-1918 2015.0031.001, Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

<sup>17</sup> Enos B. Hunt, "Barracks and Street Scene, Camp Dodge, Iowa, 6895," circa 1914-1920, Series XIV Military Affairs WWI Iowa & Cedar Falls Box 2.1a Reuben H. Miller Correspondence 1917-1918 2015.0031.001, Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

foreground. On the reverse side, it shows that this card is another of Enos B. Hunt's with it addressed to The Leader, a shoe store on 319th Main Street. Miller writes of him calling a Mr. Nelson, who would not be in until next week as according to his wife. He thought he would have been able to have a short conversation with him, catching up on events missed and how the army has been treating him.<sup>18</sup>

The next card, postmarked June 6, 1918, is captioned *Gun Practice, Camp Dodge, Iowa*, showing soldiers practicing how to hold their rifles and to aim down sights. There are several men in the colored photograph, with them near the barracks. It appears that the group of soldiers are not part of the original image, instead looking like a later addition. This is also another Enos B. Hunt card, and this one is once again for his folks back home. He is telling them that they should not have written to him until he let them know. There are circumstances that he cannot delve too deeply in but he does care for them, and sends his love.<sup>19</sup>

The card postmarked June 8, 1918 comes next and is captioned *Barracks and Street Scene, Camp Dodge, Iowa*. This image shows a collection of soldiers standing outside of their barracks, with them all in the distance while the corner of the closest barrack is near the foreground. There are about three or four barracks in the photograph. This another Enos B. Hunt Card again addressed to Miller's family in Cedars Falls. His message is brief as he mentions a spelling mistake he usually never makes in a previous letter.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Enos B. Hunt, "Camp Street, showing Barracks, Camp Dodge, IA," circa 1914-1920, Series XIV Military Affairs WWI Iowa & Cedar Falls Box 2.1a Reuben H. Miller Correspondence 1917-1918 2015.0031.001, Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

<sup>19</sup> Enos B. Hunt, "Gun Practice, Camp Dodge, Iowa, 7069," circa 1914-1920, Series XIV Military Affairs WWI Iowa & Cedar Falls Box 2.1a Reuben H. Miller Correspondence 1917-1918 2015.0031.001, Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

<sup>20</sup> Enos B. Hunt, "Barracks and Street Scene, Camp Dodge, Iowa, 6725," circa 1914-1920, Series XIV Military Affairs WWI Iowa & Cedar Falls Box 2.1a Reuben H. Miller Correspondence 1917-1918 2015.0031.001, Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.



The next card in Miller's collection is postmarked June 10, 1918 and does not contain a colored photograph of Camp Dodge, Iowa, where he had spent some time for training. Instead, this card shows a view of a building in Chicago. Captioned *63 Post Office and Federal Building, Chicago*, it shows a color reproduction of the gilded-caped Post Office and Federal Building in Chicago, Illinois, with cars, a trolley, and foot traffic around the building. There is no other building shown around in order to highlight this structure in particular. This card is published by Gerson Brothers, located in Chicago and has an information blurb located in the top left corner. Taking eight years to construct, it cost \$4,757,000 dollars, not adjusted for inflation. This message is brief, having little time to write tonight and that his fellow soldiers and him were leaving Chicago.<sup>21</sup>

The second to last card, postmarked July 10, 1918 contains an illustrated image of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, located in Washington, Pennsylvania. To guess, it is probably a Catholic church based on architectural style matching those of older Catholic Churches in my home region of Northeast Iowa. This card is published by Hugh C. Leighton Co. Manufacturers from Portland Maine and the card is made in Germany, an exception to the rest of the cards in Miller's collection which are all produced in the United States. He provides a brief update on how they were waiting to fill up on gas before continuing their journey via train; he enjoyed camping in the town during the wait.<sup>22</sup>

The last card, postmarked June 4, 1919 but dated the previous day, is an American Red Cross Information Card. There is a message typed out on the reverse side of the address

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<sup>21</sup> Gerson Bros, "63 Post Office and Federal Building, Chicago, 3191," circa 1914-1920, Series XIV Military Affairs WWI Iowa & Cedar Falls Box 2.1a Reuben H. Miller Correspondence 1917-1918 2015.0031.001, Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

<sup>22</sup> The Hugh C. Leighton Co, Manufacturers, "Washington, Pa. Church of the Immaculate Conception, A88134," Series XIV Military Affairs WWI Iowa & Cedar Falls Box 2.1a Reuben H. Miller Correspondence 1917-1918 2015.0031.001, Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

information. At Newport News, Virginia, he is informing his family he had arrived safely from overseas and is in good health. He at most believed he would be there for at most two or three days, too short for his family to visit him. If things were to take a turn for the worst, then they are to communicate with the Information Service of the American Red Cross at the Newport port. At the top are these two lines, *The United States War Risk Insurance is the best in the world. KEEP IT UP!* On the side of the address is an illustration of a motherly figure wearing a nursing outfit holding a wounded soldier on a stretcher whilst sitting. She is in front of a giant red cross behind her right shoulder with a caption underneath, *The Greatest Mother in the World.*<sup>23</sup>

It can be extrapolated that due to the stresses of war, there often is not enough time to craft such an intricate and moving card, especially due to the rapidity of the moving frontline on the Western Front during the final year of the First World War. It is simply easier to take a mass-produced card issued out and jot down a few thoughts and have it sent back than try to scrounge for supplies to create a card and then jot a message down. Though hand-made postcards often reflected the soldier's personality, his desires and artistic talent, not everyone went through the trouble of making their own.

So what importance do these cards' play in the narrative of the First World War, more specifically of Iowans overseas? Though not the main method of communication for families back home, with letters filling that role quite nicely, postcards served as a quick way to make sure they did not fall completely out of contact. Due to the lack of space to communicate all their thoughts and feelings, soldiers often jotted down a few thoughts, or niceties. A majority of the postcards covered in this thesis contained views from Camp Dodge, Iowa, since Miller spent

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<sup>23</sup> The American Red Cross Bureau of Information. "Information Service, D-19." Series XIV Military Affairs WWI Iowa & Cedar Falls Box 2.1a Reuben H. Miller Correspondence 1917-1918 2015.0031.001. Cedar Falls Historical Society, Cedar Falls, IA.

time there training. It is likely he did not see front line action like Evely and Rafferty whilst Louis most likely dealt either with injured or sick American troops. Distractions and travel occupied free time, necessitating the need for a quick response to make sure their families knew they were alright. This was the furthest many had traveled from home and the longest time spent away as well. They could not document every little detail, but wrote as often as they could to their support network back home, whether family or friends. This proved vital in making sure a soldier remained connected to their home. This gave reassurance to those back home, who worried that their child's name would appear in the newspaper as one of the many casualties of the First World War. With a mass quantity coming from the government and private companies, they became a common sight across the battlefield. Photo-realistic cards often were of staged moments, or a slice-of-life, providing a look into the soldier's life. There are ones that are made from photographs of the aftermath of battles, containing the remains of once living troops but they appear to be a rarity. The viscera of the battlefield was not reproduced often for mass media consumption, for fear of distressing citizens back home and obscuring the reality of the war.<sup>24</sup>

## **Conclusion**

As the guns fell silent across the world, and the men went home, their written records remained, saved by loved ones as memories of their journey during the First World War. Most of the surviving postcards in today's collections are of a mass-produced variety. In the past they served as an opportunity to share a quick update to family members when the time to write a letter was inconvenient for them. Postcards like those in the Cedar Falls Historical society served as a short, yet reassurance to those back home that they were not gone, that they were still

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<sup>24</sup> Booth, *Postcards from the Trenches*, 21-49, ProQuest Ebook Central. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.uni.edu/lib/rodlibrary-ebooks/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=272494>.

amongst the living. Especially with the rapidity of the Entente advance at the end of the First World War, these postcards made it possible for concerned family and friends to track the progress of their loved ones, even in spite of strict wartime censors and the every present worry that they would see their loved one names in the list of those killed in action. Today, postcards are used in a more touristic setting, though it seems that older methods will fall in obscurity with the rise of the internet and digital means of saving and sending snapshots of locations. It does not mean that they are no longer important today; postcards can help inform how today people still pick and choose what to save and what to get rid of. Though postcards seem out of date today, they can help inform in what ways we still curate what remains for future generations, providing a perspective of our lives for those that are still to come.

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