

The Civil War: On the Homefront Indiana Family Letters

Purpose of Lesson: This lesson introduces students to (1) Hoosier perspectives on the Civil War (2) the local effects of the war, specifically the drafting of soldiers, and (3) the daily challenges family members faced on the homefront while soldiers were away fighting.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Analyze primary source material from the Civil War
- Describe the war as it was perceived by those on the homefront in Johnson County, Indiana
- Describe how Hoosiers responded to the draft
- Write a document about the draft during the Civil War
- Describe the concerns soldiers had regarding the families they left behind on the homefront

Correlation to Indiana Standards (for Eighth Grade Social Studies and United States History)

8.1.21 Analyze the causes and effects of events leading to the Civil War, including development of sectional conflict over slavery.

8.1.22 Describe the importance of key events in the Civil War, including the battles of Antietam, Vicksburg, and Gettysburg, and the Emancipation Proclamation and Gettysburg Address (1861 to 1865).

8.1.27 Recognize historical perspective by identifying the historical context in which events unfolded and by avoiding evaluation of the past solely in terms of present-day norms.

USH9.1 Locate and analyze primary and secondary sources presenting differing perspectives on events and issues of the past.

Historical and Methodological Context for the Lesson:

The ideological differences that led to the Civil War were played out among localized groups of soldiers and civilians as much as they were discussed and debated among the nation's political and military leaders. Local conversation took place in the letters exchanged between soldiers and their families and among family members on the homefront.

This process of letter exchange served several social purposes. The first was to convey information. Soldiers shared some of their battlefield and camp experiences, while their

loved ones told of what life on the homefront was like in their absence. A second purpose of the letters was as a means of venting the myriad emotions that can surge through the military and civilian populations during times of war. The two sets of letters used in this lesson serve both purposes for their writers.

- The first set contains excerpts from letters sent by Andrew Bush, a Hoosier soldier from Owen County, to his wife Mary. The correspondence reveals the concern many soldiers felt for the farms and families they left behind.
- The second set includes excerpts from correspondence among family members in Johnson County and their relatives in Kentucky. Their letters dwell on the everyday concerns of farmers surviving on the Civil War homefront, but also illustrate one group's attitudes about the war and the government.

One particularly divisive issue that these letters illustrate is the drafting of soldiers for the war, a process that began in 1862 as a response to falling enlistment (and reenlistment) rates. The draft law stated that three years of service was required from all men aged 18 to 35, but, it was possible for a person to avoid the draft by “buying out” or hiring someone to replace him (usually for about \$400). Exemptions to the draft selection process could also be purchased. Usually the buyout was done by an individual, but in some states, entire towns raised money to purchase substitutes (or exemptions) for males they felt they could not lose to the war effort.

*Note that within each piece of correspondence for this letter set, spelling has been modernized, punctuation has been added, and the content has been condensed for ease of use.

Lesson Activities:

Students should read each set of letters and answer the questions associated with it.

Assessment:

After students have read and completed the questions for each set of letters, students should select one of the following assessment strategies:

1. Create a newspaper advertisement
 - A. The advertisement should highlight a community function that might have been used to raise money in order for Hoosiers to avoid the draft.
 - B. The advertisement should include at least three reasons why Hoosiers might wish to avoid fighting.
 - C. The advertisement should be no larger than one piece of 8 x 10 paper.
2. Write a newspaper editorial—“Avoid the Draft”
 - A. The editorial should be written in favor avoiding the draft.

- B. The editorial should include at least three reasons why a Hoosier might wish to avoid being drafted.
 - C. The editorial should be no longer than 400 words.
3. Write a newspaper editorial—"Support the War"
- A. The editorial should be written in favor of the war effort, whether actually enlisting in the cause or finding ways to support the effort on the homefront.
 - B. The editorial should include at least three reasons why a Hoosier might fight in or support the war effort.
 - C. The editorial should be no longer than 400 words.

Letter Set 1: "I'll Be Home for Harvest"

Excerpted from "I Take My Pen to Hand," by Vivian Zollinger, *IMH*, vol. xciii, June 1997

Men who volunteered early in the war believed it would take no more than a few weeks to suppress the rebellion. A majority of them came from farms, and they knew their work was vital to their families. They were confident, however, that those left at home could manage for a couple of months. The Owen County commissioners authorized assistance, based upon need, for the families of soldiers as early as March, 1861, but few acknowledged that need in the beginning.

Enthusiasm for the Union cause gradually gave way to concern, then despair, as a few weeks of excitement became months and then years. The soldiers' letters narrate a full range of experiences—all new, for most were away from home for the first time. The men who could write struggled to describe high adventure, rollicking camaraderie, exuberant self-confidence, chilling fear, boredom, and desperate loneliness. They worried about the farms and the families they left in the hills of Owen County, but they had a job to do and were eager to complete it.

Andrew Bush, born May 29, 1833, was the son of German born David and Fredericka Bush, who had settled on a farm in Jefferson Township. Andrew married Mary Hilligas not long before he joined the army. He wrote often to Mary during his Civil War service, and many of his letters expressed worries regarding the farm he had left behind.

You stated in your last letter that you did not know what to do with the corn I don't what to say about it but I think that Jacob ought to see to it and Somebody to geather it for you and pay it in corn they are lots of men would be glad to work that way. Get someone if you can and fat some of the largest of them hogs for fatted pork will be worth somethin.

In his next letter two weeks later he wrote, "I want you to get Jacob White to see them hogs if he can. When you wright again I want to know all the concerns respecting corn gathering and how you get along with the things in general."

The war struggled on another year and Andrew continued advising Mary on the farm and financial affairs.

Wee drawed two months pay last week and us boys gave our money to the Indiana State Agent; a man that is appointed by the Governor of Indiana to gather all the money that the Indiana boys wants to send home and he takes it to Indianapolis and express it from there to wherever directed; the boys directed ours to John long Samuel sent ten

dollars James sent fifty Dol. And I sent twenty Dollar and our Colonel holds receipts for all that was sent and if it is lost the State of Indiana is bound to pay for the los; I culd not make out the names of those you loand money to only the name of Daniel Stantz you can tell me the names the next letter you right; you wanted to know if you should get any land Clared I think you had better not for it will only be a bother to you if you had it Clared. I think that the best think that you could do would be to loan out your money out on interest what you have to spare but be Careful what kind of Security you take.

In another letter he wrote:

I am Happy to inform you that I am in pretty good Health altho I am almost as bad afflicted with boils and Sours as old Job. I had the ariceiplas on my right Side which made quite a bad Sour. I hope these few lines may find you enjoying good Health. John J Moyer came home last night he is well and harty wee were glad to see him and also glad to received the tobacco that was Sent with him to us. Wee got the paper envelopes and Stamps that were sent to us. The Health of Samuel is very bad he has had the tiford fevor which brought him down very low he is not abel to walk any yet but the fevor is broke on him and wee have him inn our tent with us SO that we can tend to him he is Complaining very much this morning with a pain in the left Shoulder and arm What ails it I cant tell it may have come from laying on it when he was in the Hospital for he mostly laid on the left Side.

About the mewls I don't wont to Sell them to herrod on any Such terms as you Stated in your letter for I don't think that he world be very good pay; if you can traid with Stanley Vanhorn for that forty that lais clost to John Moody's on any reasonable terms do it. When I was home he asqued me fifty dollars to boot between the muel and land. I have been Sorry Since that I did not take him up on the offer if he will still do that way you ought to traid for it for I think that is cheap enough at that. About the other piece that you spoke about I cant tell anything about it you will have to use your won judgment about it; but be careful about going in debt make the payments far enough of So that you can Meet them easily; I will Send you money at the rate of ten dollars per month.

1. Andrew was concerned about his corn harvest back home in Indiana. How did he suggest his wife Mary complete the harvest?
2. Why do you think Andrew showed so much concern for the corn harvest and the fattening of hogs?
3. Describe how Andrew got money to his family in Indiana.
4. How much money did he send home?
5. Andrew advised Mary against clearing land. Instead, what did he suggest?
6. Describe the trade Andrew encouraged Mary to make with Stanley Vanhorn.
7. Regarding debt, what did Andrew advise?

Letter Set 2: Southern Indiana Democrats on the Homefront

Excerpted from "Democratic Attitudes in Johnson County during the Civil War Era: A Look at the Demaree Papers," edited by William Eidson and Vincent Akers, *IMH*, vol. 70, March 1974

In the first decades of the 19th century, Samuel and Rachel Demaree raised thirteen children on their farm in Kentucky. Two of those children, grown to adulthood, moved to southern Indiana: Peter, their 4th child, and Susan, their 7th child, who married farmer William Shuck.

Both Peter Demaree and William Shuck were active in the Presbyterian Church and the Indiana Democratic party. Like other southern Indiana Democrats, they were strong supporters of states' rights and suspicious of any far-reaching laws passed by the federal government. They did not like Abraham Lincoln and strongly opposed many of his war policies. By 1864, many hoped for the election of former General McClellan, the Democratic candidate for president, whom they expected to negotiate a quick peace with the South. Many southern Indiana Democrats, like the Demarees, had family in the border state of Kentucky, or in states that had seceded from the Union, and they often expressed sympathy for the Confederate cause, even though few offered active support or fought on the Southern side. Many also avoided fighting for the Union in the war, as did all of the drafted men in the Johnson County township where Peter Demaree lived.

Johnson County, Indiana, November 13, 1861

Peter Demaree to George W. Demaree (Peter's younger brother)

Dear Brother:

I have been thinking of writing to you for some time but have neglected it. I now make the attempt.

We are in usual health at present. There are a good deal of sickness about. Fever of typhoid form seems to predominate, then there are other grades of fever and a good deal of diphtheria and sore throat.

I am very sorry that Kentucky has become the seat of war. War such as the present one is the greatest calamity that ever befell a nation. My advice to you to act as much as possible with a Christian spirit, not act rashly neither in word or deed.

You know how I stand. I have been greatly troubled about government affairs but I find it is no use to fret. I try to be reconciled as much as possible, believing that God will be with the right.

May the Lord keep us and help us to live faithful to the end.

Yours as ever, P. Demaree

Johnson County, Indiana, December 23, 1861

William Shuck to George Demaree

Dear Brother and Sister,

After long delay I shall address a few lines to you in the way of news. I shall just write to you on such subjects as though we were together.

As the war is uppermost in every man's thoughts, you will please pardon me if I should write you a random shot letter, that is, miss the subject I aim at and lead off on the war.

We have had a beautiful fall of fine warm weather which gave the farmers a fine chance to build, repair, dig, and wall wells, gather in their corn, and get up their winter wood

We finished gathering corn the 17th. We have cribbed near 1000 bushels of corn. We husked some 85 bushels on the stalk. Then we made a husking, filled our crib, and yet have a large pile on the floor. Put up 7 loads in a pen for our hogs

The war. Well, we have had several months of war with bloodshed, death, and distress but whether we are any nearer greatness than at the start I cannot tell. It is very strange that as intelligent a people as the Americans are they cannot settle a question without resorting to the sword.

The papers say the Wild Cat Battle in Kentucky was the greatest Union victory that has been achieved since the war began. As we get but little Southern news, you will give me a history of all the affairs of your state, as we are deeply concerned about Kentucky as that is our Mother country.

Well, G. W., we have another fine boy, born the 31st of August

The old lady has quit smoking except once a day. We are all in usual health. The kinfolks are generally well.

Hoping that this will find you and yours in the enjoyment of health and prosperity and that I shall hear from you soon,

I remain yours as ever, W.T. Shuck

Johnson County Indiana, October 12, 1864

Peter to George

Dear Brother,

I received a letter from you a few days ago and owing to the pressure of work I have not had a chance to write you

The people of this state has just passed through a draft. Our township raised money by subscription and hired substitutes. We had 30 men to furnish. They cost \$400 each, making 12,000 dollars and this saved our township of a draft. There was 3 other townships done the same. The rest of the county was drafted. They are all trying hard to get substitutes. Cousin D. D. Banta was drafted

I see from your last letter that you are not pleased with McClellan. It makes but little difference who is the candidate for they will elect Old Abe at all hazards and McClellan had as well be slaughtered as any other man. If there was any chance to elect a Democrat President I would rather have another man but I have no hopes. I think the sun of American liberty is about setting, never to raise again.

We are in usual health. Yours as ever, Peter Demaree

Johnson County, Indiana, May 2, 1865

William Shuck to George

Dear brother and sister,

Perhaps you will think I am in a hurry in writing you so often, but the many great changes that have taken place since we saw each other afford plenty of news.

It seems that the Rebellion is over, that the spirit of the Southern people has departed, and they are only fit subjects for the yoke and chains that have been prepared for them. Their doom is yet untold. Their case is deplorable in the extreme. If they could be allowed to return home in peace and follow their daily occupation with their slaves around them, they would be doing well, but their slaves are proclaimed free, their country destroyed, their lands to be confiscated, the public debt perhaps to be saddled upon them. Woe to their misery and their folly. I fear they will be a people without a country.

There has been a great ado here about the death of President Lincoln who has been shamefully assassinated. His corpse was at Indianapolis Sunday last. They say there was 40,000 people there although a very rainy day. Rumor says there was thousands of dollars worth of bonnets and dresses spoiled. But they all braved the storm and mud to see the chieftain.

It seems from the best proof that poor Booth has paid the penalty that is laid down in Holy writ, woe to our nation and our beloved country.

We are having quite a wet spring. Most of the farmers has but little [ground] broke for corn, from 5, 10, to 15 acres. Some few are done but there is but little planted yet. Some hardy ones are plowing up the mud, but it may be dry after awhile. Wheat has come out beyond all expectation. Grass is plenty.

Susan has been quite complaining with pain in her side and back for several days but is better.

We are all in usual health. Write soon. I remain yours affectionately,

W. T. Shuck

Our George boy is growing fast and fine.

We have broke 15 acres for corn. We sowed some oats. We broke 10 last fall. We wish to plant 36 acres.

1. Describe Peter's view of the war in November 1863.
2. William Shuck describes Kentucky as "our mother country." Explain what he means and why it is important.
3. Describe how men in Peter's township avoided going to war. Why might individuals have taken such actions?
4. Describe Peter's view about the 1864 presidential election.
5. Why did Peter write "I think the sun of American liberty is about setting, never to raise again"?
6. In your own words, rewrite the second paragraph in William Shuck's May 2, 1865 letter to George.
7. Skim the letters, in addition to discussion about the war, what other topics or issues were discussed among the family members? What does this tell you about the everyday life of people during the Civil War?