

“And here’s a line to mother:” Eastern Illinois State Normal School and the *Charleston-Courier’s* Involvement in World War I

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While Europe was entangled in alliances, war, and an assassination, the United States remained neutral in the First World War until April 6, 1917. As a result of desperation and war-weariness, Germany reinstated its disastrous policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, which eventually helped push America into war against Germany. Almost a century later, World War I continues to produce scholarly literature and uncover new evidence. However, soldiers’ stories are quickly vanishing, as letters and journals are stored away in shoeboxes and shoved into dusty attics, only to be thrown away years later. Charleston, Illinois, has a rich history regarding its involvement in the First World War and offers unique insight on those who served and died for our country. This research delves into Eastern Illinois State Normal School and the *Charleston-Courier’s* involvement in the war. Although Charleston’s history in the war was sporadic and, at times, ambiguous, there is a unique story within this little farm town.

The first direct effect of the war on Eastern was the postponement of an entertainment program scheduled for the summer of 1915. The Ben Greet English Players, who had appeared on Eastern’s campus in 1914, were unable to return a year later, as the war caused the suspension of their American tour for 1915. As far as printed records show, the school took little notice of the war in Europe in 1915 and 1916. Even the school catalogue for 1915 contains no references to the war. However, on June 30, 1916, the school’s newspaper, *Normal School News*, made a passing reference to the “war” in Mexico. As the war in Europe progressed, Eastern began to take notice of the dire situation. In December 1916, the school’s Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) raised \$142.68 in order to aid prisoners of war in Europe. This national campaign boosted the school’s reputation, as Eastern stood fifth among Illinois state schools in raising money, surpassed only by Chicago, Northwestern, Monmouth, and Knox; but surpassing both Illinois State Normal University and Southern Illinois Normal College.¹



Fig. 1 Martin “Otto” Schahrer

America’s entrance into the war on April 6, 1917, shifted interest from military training to direct enlistment in the armed forces. On April 18, 1917, Captain Gravenhorse of the 4th Illinois Infantry, National Guard, made a recruiting speech at the school. Afterward, ten students volunteered. Two days after signing up, the volunteers were given their first military drill in the school’s gymnasium. During the military training, the *Normal School News* reported that “nothing definite is known as to when the boys will be called to camp, but Captain Gravenhorse advised them to be ready to answer the call at any time.”²

In the class of 1917, eleven men entered into the military. Eventually, 251 former students and five faculty members served during America’s involvement in the war. The names of these former students and teachers are listed in the “Roll of Honor” printed in the *Normal School* annual for 1919.³ The first two faculty members to enlist were Emet N. Hopson, (agricultural professor) and Mary Josephine Booth (Librarian). After the close of the

¹ *Normal School News*, 19 December 1916; 6 February 1917.

² *Normal School News*, 24 April 1917.

³ *Warbler Yearbook 1919*, 52-53.

school year in 1917-1918, three other faculty members entered the armed services: Lewis Albert Moore (agricultural professor), C. Alvin Johnson (Manual Arts professor), and Earl R. K. Daniels (English professor).⁴ Sadly, of the 256 volunteers, nine of these men were killed, including Martin “Otto” Schahrer (Fig. 1). Arguably the most popular football player and student at Eastern, Schahrer was captain of the 1916 Eastern football team and President of the 1917 Class. Schahrer was a member of Company I, 6th Infantry Division, and died in the St. Mihiel offensive. In his honor, the football field and track was named after him on September 15, 1918. Since then, Schahrer Field has been demolished and new buildings have been erected in its place (Ford, Weller, and McKinney resident halls, the tennis courts, and Booth Library). Today, the Schahrer memorial plaque, which marked the field, hangs in the University Union’s Schahrer Room.⁵

The first former student killed in action was Corporal Fred Dunn. He was killed by a mortar shell, which also led to the death of three other men, on July 15, 1918 in the Battle of Chateau Thierry. Dunn’s body was returned to the United States. In addition, four former students died of illness while in service—Private Fred Elbert Percy, marine, and three sailors, Burt Bodwell Chenoweth, Ralph Carlis Winkleblack, and James Arlar Walling.⁶

During the war years, Livingston Chester Lord, Eastern’s first president, mourned the death of soldiers who were former Eastern students. Plagued with his own sorrowful memories- his father died fighting for the Union during the Civil War- Lord understood the hardships of war on friends and families. Lord was able to protect the school against the onslaught of prejudice, hate, and protest which accompanied the war. In one instance, he deflected a rising dilemma in regards to changing the school’s song. Anti-German sentiments raced across the United States during this time, and Charleston was no different. Eastern’s school song, written by Isabel McKinney, was sung to the tune of the German anthem, “The Watch on The Rhine.” The song was seen as inappropriate since the United States was at war with Germany, and ultimately a new melody was written to the tune of “For Us Arose Thy Walls and Towers,” which is still sung today. The person behind this new melody was Friederick Koch. Oddly enough, Koch was a native of Germany and had several relatives in the German Army. Although an American citizen, he suffered various indignities by reckless “patriots,” many of whom believed he was pro-German and even a spy. On one particular occasion a brick was thrown through his home window. Another instance involved a group of “patriots” carrying an American flag, intended for Koch to kiss in order to prove his patriotism. However, after arriving at Koch’s home and bursting into his living room without knocking, the “patriots” were greeted by Koch and an Army officer. It is said that “the abashed culprits slunk away to abodes more fitting to their characters.”⁷ Circumstances like this pressured Eastern to drop its German curriculum, but Lord would not see to it, saying, “Not from knowledge of German, but from ignorance of it, do we get into trouble.”⁸ Years later, Koch told of a day when Lord called him into his office and asked if he had bought any Liberty Bonds. When Koch said no, Lord immediately handed over 50 dollars for Koch to buy his first bond. A

⁴ Report of President to Normal School Board, 9 July 1918.

⁵ Keith R. Steele, *Eastern Illinois University Centennial* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1995), 20-22.

⁶ Charles H. Coleman, *Eastern Illinois State College: Fifty Years of Public Service* (Charleston: Eastern Illinois University, 1950), 173-174.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*

few days later, Koch was unexpectedly visited by a Secret Service man who asked, “Have you bought any Liberty Bonds?”⁹ Thanks to Lord, Koch was spared harassment and humiliation.

When researching Eastern’s involvement in World War I, one person cannot be forgotten- Mary Josephine Booth (Fig. 2). Booth was one of five faculty members engaged in active war overseas. In the fall of 1917, she joined the Red Cross and was sent to France as a canteen worker. After several months, Booth was sent to Paris under the auspices of the American Library Association. Weeks later, she transferred to General John Joseph Pershing’s headquarters at Chaumont, France. After the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, she worked at the Festhalle Library in Coblenz, Germany, and remained there until her return to Eastern.¹⁰

In 1918, due to the influenza pandemic and the war, Eastern’s homecoming was cancelled. However, the following year, the homecoming ceremonies continued. The 1919 homecoming was dedicated to Eastern soldiers who served and died in the armed forces during the World War. The opening ceremony of the football game dedicated the field to Schahrer, who had been killed in France the previous year. The faculty, alumni, and students also placed a memorial plaque at the base of Old Main’s flag pole to honor the over 200 former students who served in the war. This homecoming remembrance continued until the early 1930s, with Lord speaking at the chapel ceremony accompanied by music from Koch. In addition, in 1919, the first Warbler yearbook was created. A four-page section in the first Warbler called “In Memoriam” was a tribute to the nine former Eastern students who died during the war (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3

to fully publish topics regarding local soldiers. Nevertheless, headlines such as “Americans Are Irresistible in Their Victorious Advance” and “The Austro-German Troops Are Evacuating the Balkans,” were plastered throughout the newspaper.”¹¹ However, in August 1918, the newspaper began publishing a section called “Soldier’s Letter.” Although the Courier sporadically published this section due to a lack of letters and America’s late entrance into the war, “Soldier’s Letter” is vital to this research. The first “Soldier’s Letter” was published in August 16, 1918 and submitted by Joe Golladay’s mother. In this article, Golladay was not fully engaged in the war yet, but was enrolled in a polytechnic school in Clacksburg, Virginia, studying



Although 256 students and faculty volunteered for the United States armed forces, Eastern was a small school that lacked substantial publicity and literature regarding the First World War. As a result, all resources have been exhausted regarding Eastern’s role in the war. However, delving further into Charleston’s involvement in World War I brought me to the Charleston-Courier. Since America’s involvement began at the latter stages of the war, the Courier was unable



Fig. 2 Mary Josephine Booth

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Warbler* 1919, 54.

¹¹ *Charleston-Courier*, 13 September 1918; 18 October 1918.

blacksmithing.¹² A month later, a letter from Romo White reminisced about his unique experiences. White, writing to his mother, explained how he and other American soldiers, riding on horses, galloped into different towns and cities within France. White wrote, “[The French] ran into their stone houses and shut themselves in, peeping out at us. We soon learned, however, that we were the first Americans they had seen and they thought we were Germans.”¹³ He goes on to say, on an unknown day, his battalion met two men in French uniform. However, these two men called to the battalion in English—they were not French but Americans. These men were Americans serving for the French Foreign Legion, one from Chicago and the other from New York City. These two men had been serving the French for two years and repeatedly asked White about the “dear old U.S.A.”¹⁴ When men asked White and his battalion to visit a French hospital, the Americans, without hesitation, agreed. Within seconds after entering the hospital, the American soldiers were greeted with cheers and roses. White continued, “They had not seen any Americans as they had been here so long.... They sure spoiled us over here.”¹⁵

The following day, the *Courier* published another “Soldier’s Letter.” This time the letter was from Henry (Boney) Crim. While portraying the splendor of France, he could not help but compare the scenery to Charleston’s, saying, “France is certainly a pretty country, except in the places where the Germans have been. It is just like being around the Normal School. Trees are growing all over the country.”¹⁶ Crim’s letter then asked his mother, “Do you watch the war news very much? I do and I hope this war will end soon over here...I hope the Kaiser gets wiped clear off the earth. Believe me the Americans will do it, too.”¹⁷ Sixteen days later, another “Soldier’s Letter” appeared in the newspaper from Howard Emery, a member of the Headquarters Company F, 139th Infantry, American Expeditionary Force. Emery wrote to his parents, telling his fortunate survival from a sniper’s bullet:

On the evening of August 18, I was slightly wounded by a Boche sniper, and was nicked in two places. Both wounds are very slight, the one across my stomach being sorest. The bullet was arrested before it struck the inner lining of the stomach. The speed and force of the bullet was broken when it struck a packet of letters from home, which I carried in a pocket of my uniform, and also struck my gas mask. In this way the bullet was turned. The second bullet struck my left forearm, and lifted a small piece of flesh out.¹⁸

Emery’s story is unique and intriguing. No matter how beguiling this seems, Emery was rather lucky. Moreover, the last paragraph of “Soldier’s Letter” ended with a heartfelt request from his mother, saying, “[I] would welcome letters from...friends in Charleston.”¹⁹

In a letter received by the *Courier* from a Charleston native, Orion Reason, a copy of “Plane News” was enclosed. “Plane News” was a camp newsletter published by the American Expeditionary Forces that included witticisms and articles. The editor of the *Courier* revealed how a sergeant found a young homeless French child hiding behind a haystack. The editor

¹² *Charleston-Courier*, 16 August 1918.

¹³ *Charleston-Courier*, 10 September 1918.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Charleston-Courier*, 11 September 1918.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Charleston-Courier*, 26 September 1918

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

went on to say, “The camp has taken charge of him and is going to make a little soldier of him.”²⁰ In this same article, Sergeant Summer Easton, stationed in France, sent a letter home to his family before his battalion embarked on a major offensive strike against the Germans. Before Easton set out on this offensive attack, he wrote a beautiful poem to his mother:

Mother

And here’s a line to mother
 The best of all the lot
 With a simple little message
 Just a sweet for-get-me-not
 Its sent to her from some one
 Sealed with a kiss of love
 To wish her joy and comfort
 And blessings from above

May it find her and happy
 As the morn I went away
 May it make her burden lighter
 As she works from day to day
 May it chase away the wrinkles
 From her apt to worry brow
 And keep that smile asmiling
 Till we’ve finished up this row

There’s a brighter day coming
 For us, and those back home
 There’s ships of joy and happness
 To sail us o’er the foam
 And sight will be most wonderful
 As loved ones greet each each
 But non will be so tenderly
 When Sonny meets his Mother²¹

Private Oural H. Lee of the 114th Moblie Ord., Repair Shop, American Expeditionary Force, wrote to his mother: “I sure do feel sorry for these poor people [the French]. You don’t see any one but children and very old people, all the able-bodied men and women are gone doing their bit in this war.”²² Similar to White’s letter, Lee explained, “The French people are sure glad the Americans have come over here, they say we are their salvation, they sure do praise us and say they cannot thank us enough.”²³ Lee continued to depict the terrible conditions that accompanied war, “You cannot realize the condition of things here without seeing them. Anyone as poor as we are would be rich compared with a lot of these people...No one in America should ever grumble again. Most all of the civilians wear wooden shoes, there are leather shoes here and cheaper than in the U.S.A. but they are too poor to buy them.” After

²⁰ *Charleston-Courier*, 18 October 1918.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Charleston-Courier*, 30 October 1918.

²³ *Ibid.*

witnessing the terrible conditions in Europe, Lee asked his mother not to throw any old clothes away, but to give them to an organization that would help war ridden countries.²⁴

While searching through the *Courier* for information regarding the war, Chester Brooks, a local Charleston teen serving on the frontline in France, made a gruesome, but seemingly fictional discovery. Brooks, who wrote to his mother, like most soldiers who were published in “Soldier’s Letter,” said, “We found a fellow here from Charleston, the other day. He was dead, poor chap, but I do not know him.” He was uncertain whether he was allowed to tell the local soldier’s name. As a result, Brooks says, “I will put it on the back of the letter so that incase the censor cuts it out he will not destroy the rest of the letter.”²⁵ What makes Brooks’ story so interesting is that the dead local soldier was Martin Schahrer—arguably the most popular student at Eastern during this time.

SOLDIER’S LETTER

In the midst of a horrifying war, the *Courier* gave the citizens of Charleston confidence regarding the war.

Although not local stories, detailed pictures of “gassed Yankees” and blind soldiers appeared in the *Courier*. However, these images were not gruesome, as one would expect, but seemingly jovial. As the caption explained, a motorbus with American soldiers, who had been injured in a



Fig. 4

gas attack on the western front, arrived at an American Red Cross hospital in France (Fig. 4). Moreover, the *Courier* explained, “Had these same soldiers arrived a day sooner they might have been among the victims of the ‘Huns latest victory’ over another Red Cross hospital.”²⁶ Despite being injured from a gas attack, these “Yankees” were alive and obviously healthy—an optimistic outlook during a pessimistic war. In addition, a photo called “Occupation for Blinded Soldiers” depicted two blind soldiers, wounded during combat, and their continuous war effort (Fig. 5). Although unable to see, soldiers and sailors who were blinded during the war were learning various trades in London, England. Unfortunately, the captions offered little information regarding these various trades.

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OCCUPATION FOR BLINDED SOLDIERS



Fig. 5

However, after close analysis, one can see the blind soldiers were diligently working on a London farm, picking vegetables and sorting them in various containers. While the Second World War continues to overshadow the First World War, World War I cannot be ignored or forgotten. Searching through that dusty shoebox in the attic could potentially open new insights on the First World War. Although there will never be a Hollywood movie regarding Eastern’s involvement in the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *Charleston-Courier*, 8 November 1918.

²⁶ *Charleston-Courier*, 15 October 1918.

war, the sacrifices these men and women made were incredible. In addition, the *Charleston-Courier's* "Soldier's Letter" reveals a unique side of the American soldier—heartfelt letters with a splash of patriotism. There is something special about a personal letter from a soldier. These letters reveal a three-dimensional emotion on a one-dimensional piece of paper. Summer Easton's poem, "Mother," is a perfect example of this emotion. Before going into battle, while unaware of his future, he wrote a beautiful poem to this mother. Easton probably would have never poured out his heart quite like this, but the uncertainties of war displayed a different side of men.

Eastern's World War I Service List:

Names starred are those who died in service.

Students

Adams, Hugh	Davis, Henry	Hughes, John
Adams, Ralph	Davis, John	Hutton, Eugene
Allison, John	Dora, James	Ivy, Torney
Alison, William	* Dunn, Andrew	Jenkins, Charles
Anderson, Earl	* Dunn, Fred	Jenkins, Hubert
Anderson, Julian	Edgington, Austin	Jenkins, Lawrence
Anderson, Russel	Emery, William	Johnson, Donald
Ankenbrandt, Leo	Endsley, Fred	Johnston, Donald
Ashby, Orla	Ewald, Ralph	Johnston, Howell
Ashworth, Forrest	Fearheile, Otto	Jones, John
Bails, Clifford	Ferguson, Fred	Keene, Varden
Baker, Charles	Fitch, Ralph	Kelly, Forrest
Baker, James	Fleming, Denna	Kern, Vernon
Baker, Glenn	Forster, Arthur	Kibler, Virgil
Baker, Marvel	Frazier, Arthur	King, Bazil
* Balch, John	Freeland, Donovan	King, Chester
Barger, Joseph	Freeland, Vale	King, Ivan
Barkley, Doyt	Freeman, Charles	King, Raymond
Barkley, Durward	French, Guy	King, Robert
Beardsley, Frank	Funkhouser, James	Kisner, Edgar
Bell, James	Funkhouser, Taylor	Kisner, Roy
Belting, John	Fye, Paul	Kruse, Herbert
Bigler, Harry	Gabel, Victor	Lanman, Leo
Bigler, Walter	Geffs, George	* Leamon, Bruce
Black, Paul	Giffin, Palmer	Lee, Randall
Boulware, Maryon	Giffin, Earl	Lindhorst, Frank
Bowser, Alva	Ginther, Richard	Linthicum, Cecil
Boyer, Brent	Givens, Harry	List, Floyd
Boyle, Willard	Gordon, Eugene	Long, Charles
Briggs, Alexander	Gordon, Homer	Long, William
Briggs, Robert	Gore, Olin	Loving, Russell
Brown, Guy	Gray, Horace	Lyons, La Vearl
Bryant, Maurice	Gray, Howard	MacGilligan, Stanley
Buker, Cuyler	Greeson, Ralph	Markle, Byron

Byers, Vere
Cadle, Shester
Capen, William
Carothers, Charles
Carrell, Elwood
* Chenoweth, Burth
Chronic, George
Clossen, Albert
Coffey, William
Colvin, Leland
Comer, Eric
Connell, Harry
Conrad, Charles
Conrad, Clarence
Conrad, John
Cooper, Herman
Corlew, Joseph
Corzine, Bruce
Corzine, Harland
Cox, Gerald
Coyle, Dale
Crim, Harry
Crowe, Stanley
Mussett, Ralph
Nichols, Raymond
Noakes, Levi
Norfolk, Harold
Norton, Berne
Parks, Norton
Parks, William
* Percy, Fred
Peck, Ben
Pendergast, Thomas
Pennell, Horace
Percival, Andrew
Perisho, Charles
Phillips, Andrew
PhIpps, Thomas
Porter, Jesse
Prather, Charles
Pyatt, Roy
Pyle, Harry
Randolph, Glenn
Rankin, Merle
Rardin, Bruce
Rardin, Loyal
Reed, Robert
Rennels, Howard

Grponiger, Harlan
Hackett, Glenn
Hall, Paul
Hardin, Louis
Hargis, Elbert
Harris, Frank
Harris, Fred
Harris, Edgar
Harry, J. Roscoe
Harwood, Otto
Hawkins, John
Heinlein, James
Helm, Malcolm
Henderson, Frank
High, Lennie
Highsmith, Lester
Hill, James
Hilsabeck, Hugh
Holsapple, Coen
Hood, Harold
Hood, James
Houser, William
Huber, Edgar
Hitter, Lyman
Rucker, William
Ryder, Hal
* Schahrer, Martin
Schernekau, William
Schmaelzle, Carl
Schmaelzle, Otto
Scott, Earl
Scranton, Laurell
Serviss, Robert
Serviss, Trevor
Shoemaker, James
Shrader, Mark
Shroyer, David
Smith, Fred
Smysor, John
Snapp, Carl
Snapp, Roscoe
Snider, Howard
Staley, Ora
Stanberry, Lawrence
Starr, Norman
Stokes, Joel
Story, Floyd
Tarble, Newton

Marshall, Thomas
Mason, Carl
McAlister, Clair
McCabe, Merrell
McChandlish, Fred
McDonald, Elmer
McGahey, Harold
McGahey, Emmet
McGurty, Frank
McKee, Luther
McKenzie, Hubert
Milburn, Elmer
Milholland, Paul
Miller, Floyd
Mitchel, Byron
Mitchell, Daniel
Moats, Homer
Monfort, Warren
Montgomery, John
Montgomery, Walter
Moran, Bernard
Morrison, Eugene
Mulliken, Paul
Thompson, Earl
Tiffany, Hanford
Tittle, Felix
Taylor, Ross
Tremble, Ronald
Turner, Stephen
Turner: McKInley
Vernon, Paul
Waibel, John
* Walling, James
Weger, Clarence
Whalen, Thomas
Whalin, Oren
White, Clifford
White, Rono
Wieland, Carl
Wieland, John
Wilcox, Ira
Wilkinson, Cecil
Wilson, Harry
Wiman, Raymond
* Winkleblack, Ralph
Winkleblack, Muriel
Winkleblack, Walter
Wood, Lorin

Rich, Ciney
Richars, Glen
Richmond, Raymond

Tarble, Van
Taubeneck, Earl
Terry, Clem

Zehner, Ralph
Zimmerman, Dwight

Faculty

Daniels, E. R. K.
Mary Josephine Booth

Hopson, E. N.
Moore, L. A.

Johnson, C. A.