INTRODUCTION

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IN 1944, Ezra T. Hazeltine of South Bend, Washington, mailed a privately printed twelve-page booklet to "Aunt Polly's descendants." In doing so, he completed one of the last tasks of his late father, who had, with the aid of family materials and relatives, compiled "a summary of the Civil War experiences of his beloved grandmother," Mary Abbot "Polly" Hazeltine (1813–1892).

In 1862, Mrs. Hazeltine had left her husband and children in Busti, Chautauqua County, New York, for the Annapolis Junction hospital in Maryland. She went to find her son Clark, of the 49th New York Volunteer Infantry, who had taken ill during McClellan's retreat from the failed Peninsula Campaign. According to her daughter, Polly Hazeltine "had never traveled, and had met very few people outside her own circle." But news of her boy's condition sent her racing southward and seemingly into a new life. Having lost one son to the war the preceding spring, she did not want to give up another so far from home.

Mrs. Hazelton found Clark, but the doctor running the hospital resented her presence and interfered with her ministrations. Not to be intimidated, she went to Washington to complain of the hospital's conditions. An investigation led to the doctor's removal, and under a new administration at the hospital, Mrs. Hazeltine nursed her son back to health. She also attended numerous other stricken soldiers in the ward over a two-month stay. Known as "Mother" by the men, she became something of a saint among them for her care. While busy in hospital work, she confessed that "I don't worry about home." Nevertheless, she did write home regularly and also started a journal of her experiences, and she kept up a correspondence with the soldiers after she returned home. Years after the war, veterans in western New York recalled Mrs. Hazeltine's service with reverence. She had

saved lives at Annapolis Junction, and she had shown what courage meant. Or so the story goes.¹

The story of Mary Abbot Hazeltine, as related by her admiring family, hardly seems worthy of so long an introduction. But her story, as lived and remembered, says much about the way northerners experienced the Civil War. Though far away from the threatening presence of armies, refugees, or outlaws that afflicted many southern communities, the people of the rural and village North did not escape the war. They sent their men and boys off to fight, and they supplied them with all manner of clothes, blankets, foodstuffs, sweets, and so much more, including news from home. As soldiers “hardened” during the war and “lightened” their load by shedding all but the most necessary items to survive, the physical commerce between home front and camp slackened, but the news always mattered.

People at home did not forget their men. Rather than being isolated from the war, as some historians would have it, people on the home front wanted to participate in it. They wanted to get information about the war from their kinfolk and townsfolk fighting in it, to go to the military encampments whenever possible, and even to visit the battlefields. They were eager to do something to hasten victory on the field and bring the boys home. The need for such contact no doubt was felt more keenly in rural areas and small towns such as Busti, Chautauqua County, New York, where the departure of anyone altered social rhythms and affected someone everyone knew, at least indirectly. Regiments raised from such places were extensions of the community, closely watched and worried over. News from the front demanded a response—such as a mother rushing to her dying soldier son’s side.

The admiration for Mrs. Hazeltine, in her day and after, was the consequence of her action. No one much commented on the proper sphere of women or duties to husband and children at home when the soldier son fell ill and his mother left to attend him. Mrs. Hazeltine’s going to the hospital at Annapolis Junction simply extended the

¹ On the history of Mrs. Hazeltine’s service, see “Mary Abbot Hazeltine 1813–1892,” typescript of reminiscences, in Mary A. Hazeltine *Memoirs and Letters*, Warren County Historical Society, Warren, Pa. The collection also includes Mrs. Hazeltine’s letters from her time at the hospital, a letter from a soldier at the hospital, and several family members’ reminiscences relating stories from soldiers and about her. All quotations are from the family members’ reminiscences.

home front. As some historians insist, the war might have been too horrible to report in truth and the soldiers too much changed by war to tell what soldiering really meant, but when mothers went off to hospitals, observing the swill carts take the pine coffins to the bone yard, as Mrs. Hazeltine did, or when wounded soldiers limped home, the distance between home front and soldier closed. Keeping diaries, letters, and memoirs, and telling and re-telling the stories of the men and women who joined in the great cause sealed the union of home front and soldier after the war.

For Mrs. Hazeltine and her descendants there were not "two wars." To be sure, civilians at home and soldiers away played different roles. Some soldiers were so shaken by war's horrors or taken up with the thrill of battle that they became forever estranged from the home front, and as the war entered its third winter, soldiers' letters reveal an impatience with those at home.² But in the end, most of those at home and those away at war did not go their separate ways. They would not have it so. Therein was the meaning of Mrs. Hazeltine's story for the soldiers she saved in her day and the memory of her saved by three generations of her descendants.

In the letters, diary, and memories of Mrs. Hazeltine's service and those of the soldiers with whom she had contact, the character of the war as experienced by civilians and soldiers comes into bolder relief. Most significant is the way such documents point to evolving relation-

² Examples of such feelings are legion. Typical is the correspondence of Joseph E. Kaucher of Reading, Pennsylvania. In 1863, he reassured his mother that he was not "lousy" with vermin and urged those at home to "hurry and get well" before he returned. A year later, Kaucher carped about bad sausage and stale news from home. He also demanded that his mother destroy his letter, as he burned hers after reading them because his affairs were his own and he did not want "every Tom, Dick, and Jerry sticking his nose into my business." Kaucher also confessed that he liked the service and "would not be lazing around Reading for any amount of money." Samuel E. Peters, of the 93rd New York State Battalion, in his letters home to his brother James, of Evans, New York, would have understood Kaucher's feelings. Peters compared the peace and tranquility of home and family to the miseries and violence of army life, but found home boring when he returned on furlough and longed to return to the glory of battle. Yet neither soldier completely cut his emotional ties with home. Kaucher kept the Bible his mother gave him and expected to return to a normal life when the war ended, as did Peters and so many other soldiers writing home. Joseph Kaucher to mother, April 3, 1863 and February 1, 1864, and Kaucher to "Dear Parents," April 8, 1864, Kaucher Papers, Berks County Historical Society, Reading, Pa.; and Samuel E. Peters to James Peters, October 28, 1862 through October 14, 1864, S. E. Peters Letters (photocopies), Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, Philadelphia, Pa.

ships as the war moved from the early optimism of easy victories and a return home by Christmas to the grim business of a long, ever more demanding conflict. Soldiers coped with the new kind of war by assuming new identities for a time, but so, too, did those at home. The sheer busyness of maintaining the old ways demanded that those at home step up the pace of life and think beyond their local world. With men-folk at the front, those who remained behind managed and watched over the farm or trade for the absentees. They took up the tasks of writing to their soldiers, supplying them, and organizing relief for them, and, as best they could, attending to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the widows, orphans, and others at home who suffered from the war.

Those at home might never have been able to understand the ambivalence, even emptiness and loneliness, returning veterans first felt as they tried to reenter the communities they had left, but they did embrace them. However, in those northern locales where the war had widened political, economic, and social cleavages, the reentry of soldiers into the “community” proved more problematical. For African Americans returning to small towns in the North, the reentry forced the town to grapple with a larger definition of “community” that might recognize and respect the full citizenship of all who had stood for the Union. Yet in their own trial by fire, civilians and communities had changed, too. The change was not so much as William Dean Howells’s hero Silas Lapham observed upon returning home, that he had “got back to another world” wherein the “day of small things was past” and not likely “ever [to] come again in this country.”³ The change for much of northern society was not yet one of scale but of identity, and it included a newly found sense of common purpose and connection to “the nation.” Perhaps in no other way was the long-term meaning of the northern home front more different than the southern.

The prevailing view among those few historians who have studied the northern home front is that the war did not transform the North because the Union did not have to change much to bring about victory. No “total war” gripped northern society, as it did southern, and the demands war made in conscription, inflation, limits on political

³ William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885; reprint ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17.

dissent, and even emancipation were unevenly, even erratically, spread. They required an adjustment more than a restructuring of northern society.⁴ To be sure, particular groups, especially women reformers and African Americans, emerged from the war almost as “new Americans,” fired by the experience of organizing for and winning not only the war but a broader claim to freedom in their own society. Intellectuals, people involved in organized relief, and many veterans also came to think of themselves in national terms and to appreciate the advantages of coordinated, national effort. Their post-war associations bespoke their new identities and interests. But most northerners fought to save the Union rather than recast it, even as the Union of 1861 became during the war a “nation, under God,” dedicated to a “new birth of freedom” and the preservation of democratic government. In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln had called on all northerners, but especially those not in uniform, to stand resolutely by and for the cause, not to build a new order, but rather to realize the promise of freedom first heralded by the founding generation in 1776. Later, in their memorials to the war, northerners celebrated continuity and fidelity rather than change. They were the true heirs of the Founding Fathers.

The essays in this book do not so much challenge the general view as test it. To understand the relationship between the Union soldier and the northern home front, it is necessary to consider and compare

⁴ The literature on the northern home front and the Union soldier is comparatively sparse when set against that examining the southern experience. The two best overall treatments of the northern home front are Phillip Shaw Paludan, *“A People’s Contest”: The Union and the Civil War, 1861–1865* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); and J. Matthew Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War: The Home Front* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994). For an insightful review of the historiography of the northern home front, see Phillip Shaw Paludan, “What Did the Winners Win?” in James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr., eds., *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 174–200. Paludan’s observations about what has been done and needs to be done become more salient when read along with Reid Mitchell’s instructive essay, “Not the General but the Soldier: The Study of Civil War Soldiers,” in *ibid.*, 81–95. An earlier collection that brought together case studies of several northern communities and raised the question why social historians had forgotten the Civil War and that attempted to point directions to help historians find their way is Maris Vinovskis, ed., *Toward a Social History of the American Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). William Blair and William Pencak, eds., *Making and Remaking Pennsylvania’s Civil War* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2001), does for one state what *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front* tries to do over a broader reach.

the ways particular communities, groups, and organizations met the challenges of war during and after the struggle. This collection of original essays offers an initial foray, especially with regard to such varied experiences as recruitment, wartime correspondence, benevolence and organized relief, race relations, definitions of freedom and citizenship, claims to public memory and space, and efforts to write the history of the war. It does so by stretching across a wide geographic area, by largely pulling examples from the kinds of small-town and rural communities that formed the marrow of northern society, communities that provided most of the North's soldiers and much of its character. It also stands as an invitation to assay other northern home fronts to gauge the extent to which war changed society and the ways soldiers and civilians adjusted to the demands of war and of one another.

If no single conclusion emerges from these studies, a common perspective does. The essays in this book suggest that to see the relationship between Union soldier and northern society, one might think in terms of the stereoscopic view so popular in Civil War days. Only by looking simultaneously with both eyes through the common lens is it possible to see the whole picture. Just so for the soldier and the citizen.

Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front