

The Law of Unintended Consequences:
The Dichotomy of Gender Roles During the Great War

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Defense Date:
April 7, 2014

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Chapter One

-Introduction-

Few events have reshaped the world as the Great War did. Not only did World War One take the lives of millions of young men, from almost every continent, the war is also responsible for altering the landscape and drawing new European borders. Because of the profound reshaping of empires, political ideology, national and international relations, and a generation of young men and women who were intensely changed by the war, scholars from almost every field, including history, sociology, psychology, and political science have studied both the war and its lasting effects. Much of the research in recent years has been based on the personal experiences of the men in the trenches and has been learned through extensive readings of the letters these men sent home to loved ones, and the letters the soldiers received.

Public interest in this particular field stems from the gravity of such a momentous event. World War One is still researched, taught, and debated. Much has been written about the Great War, as it was called at the time; however, finding research that advanced the particular topic of this thesis was difficult. It was crucial to research soldiers and their experiences in the trenches to establish how life was for many men. It seemed logical to start with soldiers' letters, but soldiers' letters from almost every country, and every branch of the military, have survived, so how do we narrow it down? It was strenuous to reduce the research to a particular country, Canada, and to a particular soldier, John Jack Davey. Canada was selected for several reasons: Canada was a satellite of the British Empire, one of the main world powers at the onset of the war; Canadians became involved in the war early on as a result of the close affiliation with Britain; the vast distance between Canada and the Western Front in France played a larger role in the

correspondence between soldiers and loved ones; and there are vast resources about Canadian soldiers, specifically in the "The Canadian Letters And Images Project."¹

"The Canadian Letters And Images Project" is a website that compiles thousands of soldiers' letters from every war that Canada has been involved in. The collections of letters have been generously donated from the families of soldiers and from the soldiers themselves. The archive for World War I houses the personal documents over three hundred individual soldiers, but this only represents a small percentage of the men who served. Some of the files contain only a few letters, some only a few postcards or diary entries. Other files contain hundreds of letters, diary entries, and postcards, spanning several years. Certain files are comprised only of the letters soldiers sent from the front lines, and contain no letters from families. There could be several reasons for this. Soldiers had to carry all of their equipment with them; space was most often reserved for the most crucial items. Battlefield conditions made it incredibly difficult to keep paper and other delicate items safe and unmolested. However, the most likely reason for the lack of dual correspondence is that the soldier died while serving; therefore the letters a soldier received while in combat would not have survived.

Drawing on the Canadian website containing thousands of soldiers' letters, and published books containing letters and diary entries from soldiers from Canada and Great Britain, I will argue that both men's and women's gender roles became hazy as the fighting in Europe intensified. The letters written from soldiers to their families provides the most content, and there are more of them because many families preserved the letters after the war. Although the letters do not always talk about battles, death, and chaos, the information the letters do contain is relevant because it focuses on the attitudes and emotions of the soldiers. Taken at face value, the letters can be somewhat boring, but knowing contextual information, such as certain battles or

¹ "The Canadian Letters And Images Project." <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3>.

geographic locations, can give necessary insight into what the men were experiencing. Drawing upon secondary sources regarding soldiers' experiences in battle, and sources spelling out the socially accepted gender norms of prewar conditions will bolster the argument that the eroding of the strict gender dichotomy was an unintended consequence of World War I.

It is important for the foundation of this paper that the appropriate soldier be selected and further investigated. Jack Davey was selected for several reasons, the two most important ones being that he enlisted early, in 1914, and he survived the war so his correspondence continues until 1917, when he returned to Canada. Once reading all the letters in the Davey file, Jack became a much more interesting case study. Although he enlisted in September of 1914, he did not serve in the trenches until February of 1915. There are six months of letters, thirteen total, to his sweetheart, Kate, even before he saw combat. Additionally, Jack was shot and captured by the German military in April of 1915, so he only served in direct combat for two months. Finally, while Jack was being held captive his leg was amputated above the knee due to his injury. So although he survived the war, Jack, like thousands of others, had traumatic experiences that helped shape his gender identity from the beginning of his involvement in the war.

After researching dozens of soldiers, from various backgrounds, it became apparent that Jack typified the gender ideology that was stereotypical of men during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. His reasons for enlisting, his commitment to perform his duty, and his resolve to remain stoic in the face of adversity, all represented what it meant to be masculine. Moreover, the only other person mentioned in the Davey files is Kate, in all likelihood his girlfriend at the time he enlisted. Over the three years that Jack was serving, held captive, and then mending in England before being sent back to Canada, fifty-nine letters were sent between Jack and Kate. Jack sent forty-one letters and postcards to Kate, while only eighteen survived from Kate to Jack.

Some of the reasons for the lack of correspondence from Kate to Jack have been previously stated while others will be explained further in subsequent chapters. Kate also typified the female gender ideology that was prevalent at this time. The profession that she chose to follow, nursing, the content of the letters she sent to Jack, and her overall nurturing character, all characterized femininity during the pre-war decades.

The research that supports this paper incorporates the studies of Canadian soldiers, their letters to their families, and pre-war gender ideology, in an effort to convey the consequences of war on gender, to show how the duties individuals participated in, such as caretaking and enlisting in war, were based on pre-war gender ideology, and question if that ideology eroded away or remained consistent throughout the war. Using the research of other historians as a foundation, this paper combines the ideology of pre-war gender identity with the first-hand accounts that soldiers' letters provided, a concept that is seemingly missing in World War I historiography. The goal of this paper is to show the degree to which the Great War altered socially accepted gender norms, if at all. Victorian and Edwardian Era culture prevailed from the twentieth century until the onset of war in 1914. Over the course of the next four years, 1914-1918, men and women adapted to the changing environment and adopted new roles. Some of these roles coincided with the accepted gender norms, while other roles that challenged the social norms for gender were adopted. Some women became much more involved in factory work, and farming, and took a greater interest in war, while some men, particularly soldiers, became more involved in the domestic sphere, constantly worrying about loved ones at home, the food supply of their families, and the health and safety of loved ones. Men also started openly discussing their emotions. The dichotomy of gender was becoming ambiguous due to unforeseen circumstances that forever changed the world.

Much research has been conducted on World War One. Almost every aspect has been examined, studied, analyzed, and explored. Brilliant historians have narrowed their research into specific fields but few of them have analyzed soldiers' letters while looking specifically at gender. Other historians have researched the prevalent gender dichotomy during the pre-war decades, but have overlooked incorporating soldiers' letters into their studies. For example, Tim Cook has written two books, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*² and *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918*³, in which he specifically conducted his research about Canadian soldiers. Both books, *At the Sharp End* (2007), and *Shock Troops* (2008), look at the letters written by soldiers to their families. Cook's portrayal of the soldiers follows the Canadian Expeditionary Force into war from the first call for volunteers in 1914 and ends with the removal of troops in 1918. In the first of his two books, Cook emphasizes the early bloody battles and the Canadian experiences in war. Cook includes language such as fear, anger, sadness, and hopefulness when defining the soldiers' experiences. We do not find this language unusual but it deserves more attention. It is not unusual because so much has been written about the war that this type of language has become commonplace, but more importantly, Cook uses this language because the men writing the letters used these adjectives to describe what they were exposed to. This does not seem that ground breaking now, but men in 1914 were not accustomed to talking about their feelings, they were supposed to remain stoic and resolute. Although Cook never explicitly states it in his book, his attention to soldiers' feelings contributes to the ideas of blurring the lines of gender norms.

² Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007).

³ Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2008).

Desmond Morton has also written books about Canadian soldiers, *When Your Number's Up: the Canadian Soldier in the First World War*⁴ and *Fight or Pay: Soldier's Families in the Great War*,⁵ where he analyzes the soldiers, but also looks at the civilians who remained at home. In his first book, *When Your Number's Up*, (1993) Morton focuses on the lives and experiences of Canadian soldiers who volunteered to fight. He uses personal letters to narrate the stories of soldiers and detail their episodes of war. His second book, *Fight or Pay*, (2004) focuses on the civilians who remained at home, and some of the political policies that affected Canadians both at home and abroad. In both books Morton uses the letters written by soldiers, and saved by their families, to tell of the experiences of a wide variety of Canadian citizens, encompassing a large range of social classes and backgrounds. What is missing from these volumes, however, is any recognition of gender roles prescribed during the war. Men became greatly concerned with wives, children, and families. Women became deeply involved in the war by sending and receiving letters, reading news-paper articles about the war, and performing tasks previously reserved for men, such as manual labor on the farms, and working in factories.

Michael Roper is another historian who has written about soldiers' experiences during World War One, but he writes from a British perspective. His book, *The Secret Battle* (2009)⁶, is an examination of letters and diary entries from British soldiers to their families. Roper's thesis, as the title alludes, is based on the emotional exchange between soldiers and their families and states that surviving physical combat required more than physical toughness, one had to be emotionally strong as well. In order to be emotionally strong soldiers relied heavily on family support to keep them emotionally attached, as well as providing a reminder as to what they were

⁴ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: the Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993).

⁵ Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers' Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

⁶ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

fighting for. Roper focused his work on letters that dealt with emotions like anger, frustration, fear, hate, and love. Again, there is no overt relationship to gender in any of Roper's research although the raw emotion he draws on shows that men were willing to express their deeper feelings, especially to mothers and wives.

One of Roper's main arguments is how the relationship between soldiers and mothers changed. Soldiers often wrote feelings of anger toward their mothers for their mothers' inability to protect them from the dangers of war. Soldiers also often wrote about how the war was forcing them to take on more domestic roles, such as mending clothing, cleaning, cooking, and taking care of fellow soldiers. These tasks, which became more and more common, placed men in roles that were typically designated for women. Furthermore, men, especially men in combat situations, were supposed to be tough, manly, heroic, and virile, cooking and mending undermined these traditional masculine values.⁷

When looking for research about gender identity one does not have to look much further than John Tosh, Janet Watson, Debra Gorham, and Sandra Gilbert. All have written numerous articles that have been published, many in historical journals. In his article, "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914"⁸ Tosh analyzes the concepts of masculinity, what defined manliness in the pre-war era, and how industrialization impacted the socially constructed and accepted gender norms. Tosh focuses his research on working-class families and the role that men played in work, but also in family. He argues that as England became more industrialized jobs moved from farms to factories and men had to commute from their homes and families to seek work in industrialized areas. This meant that men were spending more time outside the house and women took on more responsibilities, such as caring for the children, and maintaining

⁷ Ibid., p.35

⁸ John Tosh, "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914." (The Journal of British Studies, Vol.44 No.2. 2005).

the house. Tosh's research sets a great foundation of the established gender norms of the pre-war era, but Tosh never mentions soldiers and his research regarding industrialization ends when the war began.

Janet Watson's research focuses on the roles women played during the war. Watson's article, "Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sister: Gender and Class in the First World War Britain"⁹, looks only at the tasks that British women participated in, and only during the war. Although her research can be used to highlight the gender stereotypes that women conformed to, it lacks any acknowledgement of men and masculinity. Watson's article works as a starting point, and gives a great interpretation of the roles women played, how these roles were either appropriate or unsuitable for women, and the social reaction from men and other women, both positive and negative.

Debra Gorham wrote an article in 1991 entitled, "The Education of Vera and Edward Brittain: Class and Gender in an Upper-Middle-Class Family in Late Victorian and Edwardian England."¹⁰ As the title states, this article is about one family, the Brittain, and their two children, Vera and Edward. Vera and Edward had the benefit of a higher social standing than others, but the two of them still exemplified what it meant to be masculine and feminine. Edward went to a traditional public school of the "elevated grammar school type" where he learned basic studies, such as reading, writing, and mathematics, but while attending school he was also instilled with the ideology of masculinity, stoicism, duty, and honor. All of these factors led Edward to enlist, serve, and eventually die for his country. Vera, on the other hand, attended an all-female public school where she excelled and was mentored by some of the teachers there.

⁹ Janet Watson, "Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sister: Gender and Class in the First World War Britain." (International History Review, Vol 19. Issue 1. 1997).

¹⁰ Deborah Gorham, "The Education of Vera and Edward Brittain: class and gender in an upper-middle-class family in late Victorian and Edwardian England." (History of Education Review. Vol 20. Issue 1. 1991).

Vera became a prominent writer, and although she was very independent, she still had the social expectations of marriage. Vera was engaged to a soldier who died in combat, which led Vera to write openly about her grief and her attitudes toward the war, and subtly challenge the war in general, but more specifically, the loss of men.

Another historian who contributed research, specifically about the alienation of men who served in combat, is Sandra Gilbert. “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War” (1983)¹¹ is an article about gender identity. Gilbert claims that men who served in World War I went to war with masculine ideas but became emotional, and disconnected, due to war conditions. She asserts that the terrors of combat that men experienced led to general anxiety and sexual anger specifically geared toward women.¹² As men became dispossessed of their patriarchal primacy, women gained more rights and privileges. Gilbert’s main argument is “that as young men became increasingly alienated from their pre-war selves... women seem to become, as if by some uncanny swing of history’s pendulum, even more powerful.”¹³ It should be noted that Gilbert’s article is now more than thirty years old and newer research has been conducted that challenges her findings and conclusions.

Jane Wendy Gagen’s research and article entitled “Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender: Physical Disability and Masculinity during First World War, the Case of J.B. Middlebrook”¹⁴ also establishes a foundation of gender ideology that contributed to the understanding of Jack Davey after he was injured and had his leg amputated. Gagen’s case study of J.B. Middlebrook serves as a comparison to the experiences of Jack Davey, the focal point of

¹¹ Sandra Gilbert, “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War”. (Signs, Vol. 8, No. 3, Women and Violence. 1983).

¹² Ibid., p. 424

¹³ Ibid., p. 425

¹⁴ Wendy Jane Gagen. “Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender: Physical Disability and Masculinity during First World War, the Case of J.B. Middlebrook”. (European review of History, Vol 14, No. 4, December 2007, p.525-541).

this paper. Gagen argues that after men lost limbs, arms or legs, in combat during World War I, they then had to renegotiate their gender identity. Gagen claims that this “indicates the dynamic and flexible notion of this dominant form of gender identity.”¹⁵ Gagen’s research includes excerpts from medical journals and doctors’ personal diaries in which procedures and patients are discussed. It appears from these documents that the soldiers who were treated more humanely by hospital staff, and generally held in higher regard, were soldiers who held stoic resolution before, during, and after their procedures to have limbs removed. Soldiers who screamed, cried, whimpered, or complained were ill-treated, neglected, and considered ‘bad patients’. Men were supposed to internalize their emotions and express their feelings of shock and terror in seclusion.¹⁶

In summary, this paper argues that World War I created circumstances that both solidified and undermined traditional and established pre-war gender roles. The conditions of war were more terrifying and devastating than anyone could have ever imagined. The concepts and ideology that both men and women had before the war shaped their experiences, but also became blurred as men were placed in situations that challenged their concepts of masculinity, and women took on roles typically prescribed for men. Using Jack Davey, and his sweetheart Kate, as a case study, shows the effects of war on one particular soldier, but one who was exposed to a wide variety of experiences. Jack’s circumstances gave him a unique lens through which to view the war. First he was a soldier, then a combatant, and then a captive prisoner. Lastly, he became an amputee and a veteran of the greatest war up to that point in history. Throughout all his experience he remained a man, all while his concepts of masculinity, duty, honor, and self were continually changing.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 525

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 527

Chapter Two

-The Dichotomy of Masculinity and Femininity-

Pre-war English Ideologies

An event as momentous and far reaching as World War One is certain to have several unintended and unforeseen consequences. Various disciplines ranging from sociology and psychology, to literature and history have studied the effects of the Great War. In recent years the study of gender and gender roles has prompted historians to rethink the fundamental effects of the war. Researching into deeper aspects of gender and gender roles, historians have begun a debate about the ramifications of war on gender. World War One is a pivotal moment of study and debate because of the strong dichotomy between socially accepted gender norms and roles during the late Victorian Era, (1837 to 1901) under the reign of Queen Victoria, and the Edwardian Era, (1901 to 1910). These pre-war gender roles were widely accepted, strictly followed, and stringently taught in the public sphere. Because the terms Victorian and Edwardian apply strictly to Britain, the focus of this paper will be exclusively on Britain and its colonies, most notably, Canada.

For the purpose of this paper, it is crucial to impart a strong understanding of the cultural expectations of men and women during the pre-wars years, specifically the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras, in order to show how these expectations changed gradually in the first decade of the twentieth century, and then much more rapidly as the effects of war became farther reaching and longer lasting. The most important concept of gender roles during this time period is the idea of dichotomy. By this I mean the strict gender norms for each sex; each one having particular roles and a distinct realm, either work or home, where they dominated. The dichotomy of the sexes during this time directly relates to the concept of separate spheres, the idea that men

and women operated and oversaw separate and distinct spheres of culture, mainly private and public life.

The ideas of hard work, perseverance, the female-dominated domestic and male-dominated public realms, men as protectors and women as caregivers, men as wage earners and women as housewives, were established in the Victorian era and further solidified in the Edwardian Era. Boys and girls were taught their proper roles from their parents and schoolteachers. Public figures like Theodore Roosevelt and Andrew Carnegie were quick to add to these concepts with public speeches and writings that hardened the ideas of living a strenuous life and that if one worked hard there was no limit to how high one could climb.¹⁷ All of this was misrepresented, however, and Carnegie used the labor of thousands of men to build his empire. It was the ideology that was important though; the pervasive ideology that hard work paid off. It should also be noted that gender expectations in pre-war Canadian were in all likelihood shaped by familiarity with both British and American concepts.

The word dichotomy appears a lot in this paper so it is important to define exactly what I mean when I use the word. Dichotomy is defined by Merriam-Webster as, “a difference between two opposite things: a division into two opposite groups.”¹⁸ More important than the separation into two groups is the idea of opposition. Dichotomy, for the purposes of this paper, is the idea that not only are there two groups, but these groups are represented as being entirely different with no over-lapping parts. The roles that men played were masculine; opposed to this were the roles that women play, those roles being feminine. As stated, there was little to no over-lap between these strict gender norms. Early in the Victorian Era men played more of a domestic role, but as John Tosh points out this was because men typically worked from home, had their

¹⁷ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life*, NY, 1902, speech

¹⁸ Merriam-Webster dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> online version, accessed February 12, 2014.

offices close to where they lived, or traveled very short distances between work and home.¹⁹ One effect of the Industrial Revolution was that men now commuted further for work, leaving the tasks and responsibilities of home to women. It became the sole responsibility of women to raise the children, cook the meals, or supervise the staff who did this for the family, and maintain overall home cleanliness.

Some historians have researched similar topics but have neglected the writings of the soldiers themselves. Janet Watson, for example, has written articles about female volunteers during the war.²⁰ Other historians, such as Desmond Morton, in his book, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War*, have analyzed the writings of soldiers, both letters sent home and diary entries, but have ignored the aspect of gender when examining the writings. It should be noted that while diary entries might be more personal and revealing of a soldier's true thoughts and feelings, although this is a subject of debate as well because many diary entries are mundane and really not much more than a list of places, activities, and weather, they are harder to come by due to the nature of warfare, especially trench warfare. Many more letters written by soldiers to their families far removed from the fighting have survived for obvious reasons.

As the Victorian era came to a close and the Edwardian era began, the notion of fathers spending more time with their family and assisting in the raising of the children became more popular, although only wealthier families could afford this luxury. This soon became a class distinction that further separated the upper classes from the lower. Working class families typically relied on the financial income that children could provide, whether it was farm work or

¹⁹ John Tosh, "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914." (The Journal of British Studies, Vol.44 No.2. 2005), P.335

²⁰ Janet Watson, "Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sister: Gender and Class in the First World War Britain." (International History Review, 19:1, 1997), p. 33

factory work. Middle- and upper-class children were allowed to attend school, many were sent to boarding schools, and many went on to college. When World War One erupted men from all walks of life enlisted. Better-educated men, which typically meant upper class men, became officers, while the lower class men filled in the rank and file. This new menagerie of young men brought diverse backgrounds, educations, and experiences with them to the front lines.

The education that the officers received directly contributed to their concept of manliness and what it meant to be masculine. The military is exceptional at layering together opposing ideas of masculinity and submissiveness, dominance and obedience, independence and reliance. In the military, which breeds masculinity and is predominantly a male field, men must learn to lead and to follow, to take care of themselves but also help their fellow men. This ideology creates a brotherhood that binds the soldiers together, but also reinforces their identities as separate and distinct. Only those who participate in war can understand the experiences of battle, death, killing, and bloodshed. It is exactly these qualities that Sandra Gilbert claims alienated men who participated in war from civilians who did not.²¹ It is also these qualities that reinforced the idea of manliness.

In order to determine to what extent the war brought about a transformation in gender roles and identities, I must first establish the dominant norms during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Initially, this shift in gender roles occurred slowly, but once war broke out across Europe the changes became more prevalent, and therefore more apparent. As John Tosh proposed in his article, “Masculinities in an Industrialized Society: Britain, 1800-1914”²², some of the core elements of masculinity are defined by a man’s role and responsibility, and his

²¹ Sandra Gilbert, *Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War*. (Signs, Vol. 8, No. 3, Women and Violence. 1983), p. 426

²² John Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrialized Society: Britain, 1800-1914”, (Journal of British Studies, Vol44. No. 2, April 2005).

capacity, to provide economically for his family.²³ Additionally, men were supposed to remain sober, both clearheaded and abstinent, in order to act reasonably and react rationally to adversity, which men were supposed to confront with stoic resolution. Finally, men were charged with defending their home, defined as both their residence and their country, from threats of aggression. Men were thought to be aggressive, rough, dominant, powerful, vigorous, rational, and unemotional.²⁴

Women, on the other hand, were the primary caretakers of the domestic sphere, responsible for cooking, cleaning, and overall maintenance of the house and nurturing of children, the elderly, and the infirm. Furthermore, women represented the values men deemed worthy of fighting for. Women were supposed to be chaste before marriage, after marriage they were to remain loyal and true. As a result of the dichotomous nature of Victorian values, women were thought of as the opposite of men; smooth, soft, dainty, meek, passive, irrational, emotional, and in need of protection. Some women embraced these values, choosing to stay within their prescribed domestic realm. These women chose to get married, bear children, remain at home, and maintain the family and house. Other women sought to break the social norms by attending secondary schools, getting jobs, refusing marriage proposals, participating in pre-marital relations, and spending more time in the public sphere. This latter group of women tended to attract more animosity from the common public. They were seen as going against the social norms and therefore depicted as off-putting.²⁵

It is important to understand that not all the pre-war gender assumptions about masculinity were dissolved by the war. Some of the prevalent gender norms were reinforced,

²³ Ibid., p.331

²⁴ Ibid., p. 335

²⁵ Janet Watson, "Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sister: Gender and Class in the First World War Britain." (*International History Review*, 19:1, 1997), p. 36

while others were eroded away. Pre-war conceptions of masculinity included, in John Tosh's words, "physical vigor, energy and resolution, courage, and straightforwardness."²⁶ In the Victorian and Edwardian eras men dominated the public sphere. Independence was a powerful trait that exemplified men. Tosh describes independence in Victorian terms as "the capacity to make one's own way in the world and to be one's own master."²⁷ Men's lives consisted of family and work, but also of acquaintances and public life. Much emphasis was placed on homosocial activities. Men spent time and money publicly, while women were relegated to the privacy of their homes. Men were defined by their jobs, while women were defined by their marriage and family life. This concept further solidified the idea that men belonged in the public sphere and women were confined to the domestic sphere. These ideas carried over into the war and men struggled with the concepts of taking orders, being subjected instead of dominant, and having to care for themselves and other men in ways they never had to before.

Strong class distinctions were very prevalent during this time. Upper class educated men were given the task of upholding the highest social norms and standards. The lower classes would look to these elite men for examples of how to hold themselves in public, how to treat women, which occupations held higher merit, and which gender roles were to be adhered to more stringently. In this regard, the education system became increasingly important, as was the case with Edward Brittain. Edward Brittain was born in England in November of 1895. He was the second child of a middle-class family that placed a strong emphasis on education. Young boys, like Edward Brittain, were sent off to school in order to acquire the skills needed to be successful men, men who could rule the country.²⁸ His public schooling instilled in him not just

²⁶ Ibid., P.339

²⁷ Ibid., p. 336

²⁸ Deborah Gorham, "The Education of Vera and Edward Brittain: class and gender in an upper-middle-class family in late Victorian and Edwardian England." (History of Education Review. Vol 20. Issue 1, 1991), p.35

an education but also other skills and ideas that helped shape his understanding of society and his place in the larger perspective. Edward's housemaster commented on this when he said, "There are so many good lessons to be learnt here, not in the actual books; and Edward is getting a distinctly firmer hold of these now"²⁹ These extracurricular experiences were different for men and women, and particularly different for upper classes and lower classes. The education that Edward and Vera Brittain received was restricted to the young boys and girls of the English middle- and upper-classes; it was completely alien to children of the lower-middle and working classes.

Men with Edward's upbringing were often placed in positions of leadership, such as officers. Officers received many distinct advantages. While in the rear, officers received better meals and more rations, and must notably, officers, who came almost exclusively from the middle- and upper-classes, were not as closely censored as the rank and file soldiers, who came predominantly from the working classes. The sense of honor that was assigned to officers -as an officer you were expected to know the difference between what is right and what is wrong- and you would not do the wrong thing, was not ascribed to men from the working classes. Therefore, the rank and file soldier had to be more closely 'policed', which included censoring their letters.³⁰ As a result, what men might feel comfortable writing would be shaped by their social background and schooling; their familiarity with letter-writing as a social practice; the person to whom they were writing; their military rank; and censorship.

During World War One, censorship was in its infancy. The lessons learned between 1914 and 1918 carried over into the World War Two and every war since. The easiest way to control information was to censor the letters soldiers were sending home. Using Jack's letters to Kate,

²⁹ Ibid., p. 28

³⁰ "The Canadian Letters And Images Project." <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3>.

we begin to see clear examples of censorship; return addresses removed, words blacked out, and occasionally pages torn or missing. Kate, however, had much less oversight and censorship of her letters to Jack. The various military branches were less concerned about the civilian population leaking information. Additionally, the Allied forces were able to control the flow of mail and packages from behind their lines. A soldier deep in the trenches, or possibly in enemy territory, was much more susceptible to having his letters confiscated by the enemy.

There are millions of soldiers' letters that could be examined, but for the purposes of this paper I selected the letters of only one soldier, John Jack Davey. Jack, as he preferred to be called, had a typical lower-class upbringing in England. He was born in 1888 and remained in England until he immigrated to Canada in 1912, age twenty-three. The exact reasons for his immigration cannot be determined, but it can be inferred that Jack immigrated for the same reasons as hundreds of thousands of other British citizens had. Jack wanted more opportunity, more rights, and the freedoms that Canada offered, such as a less distinct social class system where one's birthright could either progress or stymie one for life. In England Jack would have had few opportunities to advance his education, or his socio-economical status. However, leaving England for the opportunity to progress sounded promising not just to Jack, but also to many others.

Jack enlisted in the military in September of 1914, at the age of twenty-four. While serving overseas Davey was captured in April 1915, and was held prisoner until 1917 when he became part of a hostage exchange. The only letters in the Davey collection are letters he wrote to Kate, his sweetheart before he enlisted.³¹ Between 1915 and 1917 Jack only wrote forty-one letters to Kate. The lack of correspondence can be explained by his capture in late April of 1915;

³¹ Ibid., Davey files

once captured he was allowed to write only two letters a month and one card a week.³² It is clear that he maximized this small allowance because the length and content of the letters changed dramatically after his capture. Before Jack's capture his letters were mildly affectionate and mundane in the topics discussed, dealing with everyday life, and the inner workings of his camp. After his capture the letters are filled with assurances of his safety, progress of his injuries, and his overall treatment while imprisoned. There is also a difference in the degree to which Jack talked about his emotions, or uses emotional words. Before his capture he would often sign letters, "Your ever loving Jack", after his capture this changed to, "Love and kisses from Jack, XXXXXX" (some letters have upward toward sixty or seventy Xs).³³ Additionally, as Kate responded to Jack's loving letters, she responded in kind, signing her letters, "tons of love & kisses from your loving Kate."³⁴ This only strengthened Jack's commitment, which he displayed with his affectionate correspondence.

Because of the drastic nature of Jack's transition in April of 1915, he becomes an interesting case study. Although he never received a formal education, Jack subscribed to the prevalent gender ideologies that existed at the time. He was influenced by both British and Canadian culture, although the two were not vastly different. His early letters lack emotion, even when writing to his girlfriend. After his capture, however, the letters are inundated with emotion and reassurances. This language was not new to him; he certainly did not learn these words, phrases, and meanings while in captivity. So it is reasonable to assume that the words and phrases were with Jack all along, but he was just instructed, by following the example of other men, not to use this vocabulary. Jack appears to have relaxed his strict notion of masculinity when Kate responded to his letters with equal affection. However, after he was captured he no

³² Ibid., Davey files May 2, 1915

³³ Ibid., Davey files May 2, 1915

³⁴ Ibid., Davey files, Feb 5, 1915

longer had other men around to curb his emotions, although a foreign censor might have read his letters before mailing them, though how much a German censor would have understood the content of the letters is open to question. To further this notion, I would suggest that in times of distress men would become more open with their feelings. Although this was seen as a feminine characteristic, when one does not know how much longer one might live, the fear of being perceived as feminine becomes minimal in comparison to the fear of death. The letters written by soldiers when they spend time in the trenches are more emotional and forthright than the letters written by those who are out of harm's way. The letters from Jack Davey to Kate represent this.

While Jack Davey was away serving his country, his love interest, Kate, remained in Victoria, Canada. While Jack served in the trenches, Kate spent her time carefully balancing the social demands of a young, single, female, with her commitments to Jack. Although they were not married, or even engaged at this point in their relationship, it is clear from their correspondence that they both intended to remain loyal to each other. While Jack struggled with doing his duty, fighting for his country, and eventually grappling with the devastating loss of his leg, Kate struggled with finding work, maintaining her social freedoms, and worrying about her soldier, Jack. Although their lives would eventually return to a state of normalcy, World War One greatly challenged the social identity of not only Jack, but of Kate also.

Kate, whose last name is never revealed throughout the correspondence, wrote to Jack regularly, an average of about one letter per week, while he served in the war. However, between January of 1915 and January of 1917 only eighteen letters are documented on *The Canadian Letters and Images Project* website.³⁵ The regularity of writing is most apparent in the frequency of her correspondence in June of 1915, shortly after Jack went missing in April. Kate wrote a letter every Friday for four weeks straight until she was reassured that Jack was safe. Other times

³⁵ Ibid., Davey files

there are large gaps in her messages to Jack. For example, Kate wrote to Jack on February 16, 1915, and then another letter was not mailed until April 14, 1915. There could be several reasons for the dramatic irregularity of documented correspondence. The most likely reason is that Kate did in fact send letters, and Jack received them; the letters just did not survive the conditions of war. Another possibility is that the letters were written and mailed but the address was incomplete, or Jack was no longer stationed where Kate sent the letters. This could have resulted in undeliverable, lost, or dead mail. Regardless of the reasons, the regularity with which Jack and Kate received letters was a regular theme in both correspondences.

Jack's letters to Kate were never returned to him. This is most likely because he always addressed his letters to the same location. Kate, however, frequently experienced letters being returned to her. Other women who wrote letters, both to Jack and other soldiers, also experienced letters being returned with alarming frequency. Kate complained to Jack of this on July 14, 1915, "It is so disappointing to have ones letters returned, & I've had quite a few. Bee got two back yesterday that she wrote you in May."³⁶ There were primarily three reasons for undelivered letters or letters returned to sender. First, like most soldiers, especially lower class soldiers, Jack was frequently relocated. After enlisting in Victoria, Canada, Jack was sent across the country by train where he took a transport ship from the eastern coast of Canada to England. After finishing his training in February 1915 in England, Jack was then transferred to France where the majority of the fighting occurred, and consequently where most of the men were needed. After his capture in April of 1915, Jack was held in Germany until he was transported back to England in 1916 as part of a prisoner exchange. Certainly, Jack's circumstances were more difficult than most due to his capture, but a high rate of relocation was something many soldiers experienced. Secondly, and this primarily affected lower class soldiers as well, the return address was often removed

³⁶ Ibid., Davey files July 14, 1915

from Jack's letters to Kate by military censors. Lower ranking soldiers received more oversight and censorship than higher-ranking officers. This made it very difficult to keep track of Jack's whereabouts and send letters to the appropriate locations. Moreover, letters were always addressed to a specific regiment or battalion, rather than a specific person. Letters destined for Canadian soldiers were shipped to London first, where they were sorted and forwarded to the appropriate location on the Western Front, based on where the battalion was located. However, battalions moved around frequently and it was sometimes hard for the letters to keep up with these movements. Thirdly, the weather played a crucial role in the ability and frequency of letters that were delivered. If a letter could not be delivered it would be sent to the "dead mail" office until the person who initially sent the letter recovered it. Some letters were never recovered.

If Kate did not know the exact whereabouts of Jack, or if she had received letters from Jack that had the return address either blacked out or completely removed by the censors, she would hold on to written letters until she had more information about Jack's location. This became the case much more frequently after Jack had been captured and German authorities censored his letters. In a letter to Jack on July 14, 1915, Kate wrote, "Once again I am writing to you, but I don't know where to address it to, so I'm just going to keep it back until I do hear from you."³⁷ Sometimes, Kate reasoned, it was better to continue to write letters and not send them until she knew where Jack was, than to send a letter and have it returned several weeks later. As of July 31, 1915, Kate was still unsure where Jack was. She wrote to him "I have been sending my letters to a Jack Davey in Connaught Hops Aldershot. I am so sorry dearie as I know you have nothing to look forward too (*sic*) but letters, & I wish I had written to both places." The other place where Kate would have sent the letters is not told but this clearly depicts the

³⁷ Ibid., Davey files July 31, 1915

difficulty of mail delivery, the frequency of soldier relocation, and the lack of information available.

A frequent theme in both the letters Jack sent to Kate, and those that Kate wrote to Jack, is the amount of mail that became undeliverable. As the war dragged on for longer than anyone expected, both Kate and Jack became increasingly frustrated with the mail system, and become progressively disappointed when letters were ‘returned to sender’. In a letter dated February 5th, 1915 Kate wrote, “I’m very sorry dear that you don’t get my letters as often as you ought to do. I should feel very miserable if it took yours as long to reach me, the one I got to-day (*sic*) just came in 18 days, that is longer than usual.”³⁸ The letters did have to cross a great distance however, coming from Victoria and traveling to England, and then further on to France. Additionally, some twelve and a half million letters were written and sent every week from the soldiers in the trenches to their families, friends, and loved ones.³⁹ This is a staggering number and only accounts for the letters the soldiers were writing. Millions more letters were being delivered to the soldiers every week. It is an understatement to claim that the postal services were ill equipped to handle the amount of mail and packages that was being sent. Additionally, if there were even a small discrepancy in the address of the recipient the mail would be stamped as “return to sender”. Due to the heavy flow of mail going into Europe, the lack of a competent delivery system, the mass number of soldiers serving in various places, and soldiers frequently moving locations without being able to inform their families, mail addressed to soldiers could be undelivered, delivered incorrectly, or held onto until the soldier was located, in which case the soldier could receive several months of letters at a time.

³⁸ Ibid., Davey files Feb. 5, 1915

³⁹ Tim Cook, “At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916”. (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007). p.127

As was previously stated, weather could also greatly hinder the transport of mail, and make mail undeliverable. In 1914 mail was picked up by mail carriers bi-weekly. The mail carrier would then organize the letters and packages by hand before everything was loaded on to a train car to various destinations.⁴⁰ If there was inclement weather, such as heavy snow, as was often the case during Canadian winters, the rail lines could become impassable. The trains would be stalled until the tracks could be cleared. Sometimes this could take several days or even weeks. Moreover, when the weather was particularly bad the mail carrier was not able to make his regular routine and Kate was not able to get to town to drop off her letters and parcels. In the winter of 1916, specifically January and February, the weather was particularly bad. January 27, 1916, Kate wrote, "No mail from you this week, but the C.P.R. (Canadian Pacific Railway) trains are very much delayed owing to the bad weather."⁴¹ In February of that same year Kate wrote to Jack, "Since the last time I wrote you we have been snowed up. The postmaster has not been up here since Tuesday when I fortunately gave him your letter to post."⁴² Kate was "snowed up" for almost a week. Her situation became so bad that she began to worry about her food supplies. It seems as if Jack, on the one hand, always had bad weather; cold and rainy, which made for muddy and wet trenches. Kate, on the other hand, had ever changing, seasonal weather. When the weather was nice she always wished that she could somehow send it to Jack half way around the world.

As the war dragged on, and it was clear that it would not be over by Christmas, women became increasingly interested in war, the war effort, living conditions of the men in the trenches, and combat. In the later years of the war rationing took its toll on local populations.

⁴⁰ "The Canadian Letters And Images Project." <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3>. Davey files Feb. 6, 1916

⁴¹ Ibid., Davey files Jan. 27, 1916

⁴² Ibid., Davey files Feb. 6, 1916

Women, children, and the elderly were making larger and larger sacrifices to support the war effort. Each country distributed information about “doing your part” and the citizens who remained at home were made very aware of how horrible the conditions in the trenches were. Although the men and women who remained at the home front had large amounts of information regarding the living situations and conditions of the men in the trenches, they could not begin to fully understand what the soldiers were actually experiencing. In this area only am I willing to concede that there was a separation between the front lines and the home front. It has been argued that because there was no way for people outside of combat conditions to understand truly and fully what the soldiers experienced, the men who returned home, either on leave, due to injury, or end of duty, were alienated from family, friends, and society.⁴³ It should be noted that this argument is dated and scholars have now found compelling information to dispute Gilbert’s claims. It is clear though: the world the soldiers were fighting for was not the world they returned to.

Few could continue to ignore the role women played in the war and how their involvement had contributed to the war effort. However, after the war was over, gender roles were still heavily enforced and when male soldiers returned to their homes they believed they should be given their jobs and titles back. Men fought hard for victory and they wanted the respect, admiration, and prestige they felt entitled to. Women had contributed generously to the war effort as well. They had sacrificed, lost loved ones, raised children, donated time, money, and other resources, and gained prestige of their own. Women could not fully grasp the horrors of war, and men could not truly understand the hardship of years of sacrifice, grief, fear, and

⁴³ Sandra Gilbert, *Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary, and the Great War*. (Signs, Vol. 3, Women and Violence, Spring, 1983), p425

doubt that women had experienced. Each gender had gone through a metamorphosis without the opposite gender present.

Jack performed his assumed gender identity by enlisting in the war, ‘doing his duty’, and defending his countries, both Canada and England. While he served in the trenches, Kate also performed her assumed gender identity. As will be discussed in a subsequent chapter more thoroughly, Kate took on a socially accepted role for women, nursing, and in Kate’s case nursing young children. This further solidifies how the separate spheres ideology created an expectation for women to engage in nurturing activities, whether inside the home or outside. Given that this is precisely what Kate did during the war, it clearly demonstrates pre-war gender expectations for women.

-Chapter Three-
John (Jack) Davey

After reading the forty some odd letters that Jack sent to Kate between his enlistment in 1914 and his return to Canada in 1917, it becomes clear that his experiences were in some important ways unique. First of all, Jack enlisted very early on in the war, and with the Canadian Expeditionary Forces, a subordinate group of the British Expeditionary Forces. This in itself is not as unique as it is interesting. He had left England for more, and better, opportunities in Canada, but had such a strong sense of nationality that he enlisted and returned to defend his homeland. As Desmond Morton points out in his book, approximately half of all the men who enlisted in the CEF were recent immigrants from England.⁴⁴ He served much of his time in the French trenches, but was wounded in 1915 when he was shot in the leg. After his injury Jack was captured by German forces and held captive for almost two years before he was returned to England as part of a prisoner exchange. The exact battle and circumstances surrounding his injury and subsequent capture are never fully revealed, although on May 2, 1915, Jack sent a postcard to Kate describing his situation, “My dearest Kate A line to let you know that I am still alive, have a bullet wound in left knee progressing favourably (*sic*), Will tell you more about it in letter but we are only allowed to write two letters a month & I think one card a week so I must divide them up between you & mother.”⁴⁵ This in itself is interesting. Additionally, the leg he was shot in was amputated; Jack had to learn to walk again, and would forever be forced to overcome the mental and physical obstacles of being a cripple. Much of the correspondence between Jack and Kate survived the war because Jack was removed from combat. Examining the

⁴⁴ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: the Canadian Soldier in the First World War*. (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993). p.101

⁴⁵ "The Canadian Letters And Images Project." <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3> Davey files, May 2, 1915

letters between Jack and Kate gives me a revealing perspective on war, gender norms, and the communication between men and women during World War One.

When Jack left England much of his family remained, as was the case with most immigrants and their families during this time. Upon arriving in Canada Jack did what most other immigrants did; he looked for work. As is revealed in the letters, Jack moved to Victoria, British Columbia. He came from working-class families and intended to find regular work upon his arrival. The letters I examined do not specify what type of work Jack was in, the letters do not tell much about Jack before he enlisted. Truth be told, there is nothing remarkable about Jack until 1914 when he enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Forces. Due to military regulations at the time, Jack was stationed with several other men, most of them from Canada, who hailed from a similar upbringing.⁴⁶ These men quickly formed a strong group and acted much like a typical family would, cooking and caring for each other in the field. These men shared family stories, packages families sent to them, and asked about each other's wives, mothers, brothers, sisters, and friends who might be serving as well. Jack often served in the trenches with the same group of men; as a result close relationships were inevitable.

Jack enlisted in August of 1914, from a combination of peer pressure and the urge to defend his country.⁴⁷ Jack believed serving in the military was part of his ascribed masculine identity. Jack also subscribed to the concepts of defending the weak, refusing to succumb to 'cold feet', and the need to work hard and support oneself. In the first letter he sent to Kate, Jack explained his situation, "I had no idea of joining when I left you on the Tuesday night or at least not so soon, but when I got in town I went around to see the bulletins... & the notice in the

⁴⁶ "The Canadian Letters And Images Project." <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3> Davey files

⁴⁷ Ibid., Davey files, Aug 16, 1914

window saying the 88th wanted recruits so I went down and enlisted”⁴⁸ From this it becomes apparent that Jack was already thinking about enlisting; he just was not sure when. Furthermore, his willingness to sign up on the spot demonstrates his willingness to do his duty.

After enlisting, he trained in Canada for a few months before he was relocated to England in November of 1914. He then finished his training in England before being sent to the Western Front in France in February of 1915. The first letter sent to Kate from actual combat conditions is dated February 23, 1915, and states, “We expect to go in the trenches at any time now so that by the time you get this we shall in all probability have been under fire.”⁴⁹ Although his battle experience was short-lived, the letters before battle, during his time in the trenches, and after his capture create a timeline that allows for a comparison of Jack’s gender identity, and how, or if, it changed during these experiences.

Even before he was disabled and discharged, Jack was worried that he would somehow be labeled a deserter. He wrote letters to Kate speaking about other soldiers who could be honorably discharged. The most prominent display of this was January 10th, 1915. In a letter to Kate, Jack wrote, “I hear that any man wishing to get an honorable discharge from the contingent can get it & have his transportation paid back to Canada. I would apply for mine at once only they will say I have cold feet. I don’t think you would like to hear that said about me would you?”⁵⁰ From this it is clearly evident that Jack thought about leaving the war but hesitated because of what others, especially Kate, would think of him. It was strongly believed during this time that the most important thing a man could do for his country was to die protecting her. These sentiments were pervasive throughout the British Empire, affecting every man regardless of social class. Edward Brittain, an upper class, well-educated young man from England, was

⁴⁸ Ibid., Davey Files, Aug. 16, 1914

⁴⁹ Ibid., Davey Files, Feb. 23, 1915

⁵⁰ Ibid., Davey Files, Jan. 10, 1915

provided with similar ideas at his public school. Edward's headmaster boldly told Edward on the day of his graduation, "if a man could not be useful to his country he was better off dead."⁵¹ Unfortunately Edward was not as lucky as Jack. Edward died in combat, fighting for his country, at the age of twenty-two.

Jack would often write to Kate about the men he served with. In a letter sent on November 16, 1914, Jack stated,

One of our boys in the tent is to be married when he gets his next leave the girl is in London. I saw her the other day I was in Salisbury (*sic*), she came down for the day to see him. She is quite a nice girl & sends him (or rather us) as its all for the tent what the boys get here all kind of nice things we have a big plum pudding here now when we have time to warm it up.⁵²

Jack was also quick to recognize the social status of his mate's fiancée, "I think she must be pretty well fixed as she spends her whole time making things for the soldiers."⁵³ This denotes her lack of a need for a job; thereby stating she has enough wealth to provide for herself. The venture of making items such as socks and hats for the soldiers was volunteer work for British women of almost all social classes.

Jack and Kate did not benefit from this type of financial freedom. Throughout his service Jack made several references to work, both his and Kate's. In a letter dated 1915 Jack wrote, "I hope to get fixed up alright so as to be able to do some kind of work when I get back to Victoria."⁵⁴ This particular letter becomes important because the exact date is unknown. If it was written before Jack's injury it suggests a pretty ordinary desire to be able to support himself. However, if it written after his amputation, it would suggest something much deeper about his

⁵¹ Deborah Gorham, "The Education of Vera and Edward Brittain: class and gender in an upper-middle-class family in late Victorian and Edwardian England." (History of Education Review. Vol 20. Issue 1), p. 33

⁵² "The Canadian Letters And Images Project." <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3> Davey files, Nov. 16, 1914

⁵³ Ibid., Davey files, Nov. 16, 1915

⁵⁴ Ibid., Davey files, 1915 (no specific date given, possibly after Jack's injury and amputation)

concerns whether he would be able to work at all. Because of the frequency with which work appears in the correspondence between Jack and Kate, it becomes very clear that work was something they were both required to do, and something they both took pride in. Jack especially held himself to a high standard of work. Kate often took jobs in clerical work, but she continued to work while Jack was abroad. Jack asks her in several different letters how her work is going, what her job is like, and if she is managing. He often states that he can send her money if she needs it, a masculine characteristic. Additionally, Jack states a couple of times that Kate can always write to his mother if Kate needs help with anything, financial or otherwise. Shortly after Jack enlisted his father died. With the help of Jack's brother, Kate, and Jack's mother, arrangements were made to have his father buried in the family plot in England. Jack sent additional funds to Kate to ensure everything was handled correctly. Jack also sent enough money to secure to additional plots, one for Kate and one for him.

Between 1914 and 1917 Jack wrote only forty letters to Kate. The lack of correspondence can be explained by his capture in late April of 1915; once captured he was allowed to write only two letters a month and one card a week.⁵⁵ It is clear that he maximized this small allowance because the length and content of the letters changed dramatically after his capture. Before Jack's capture the letters were mild and mundane, dealing with everyday life, weather, and the inner workings of his camp. After his capture the letters are filled with assurances of his safety, progress of his injuries, and his overall treatment while imprisoned. There is also a difference in the degree with which Jack talks about his emotions, or uses emotional words. Before his capture he would often sign letters, "Your ever loving Jack", after his capture this changed to, "Love and kisses from Jack, XXXXXX" (some letters have upward toward forty or fifty Xs).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid., Davey files, May 2, 1915

⁵⁶ Ibid., Davey files, May 2, 1915

One of the most drastic changes in Jack's behavior and correspondence occurred after his capture. This should come as no surprise. The war correspondence that reached Canada spoke of war atrocities that Jack discussed with Kate. In a letter sent to Kate on February 2, 1915, Jack wrote,

Yes dear I am feeling fit for the best German that ever lived, after all they have been doing to the women & children over there, just imagine them doing the same in England. Its been bad enough here with the bombardment of the East Coast & the Zeppelin raids but that's nothing to what they have done in Belgium. They don't deserve any mercy at all after that & instead of keeping them as prisoners at the country's expense they ought to be shot at once & that would be a better death than lots of them deserve.⁵⁷

His tone toward prisoners of war became much more tolerant when he became one himself.

After Jack returned to Canada in 1916 he was still a great distance from Kate, she was in Victoria and he was in Toronto, and letter writing was their only communication. Jack wrote to Kate about a fellow prisoner who cared for him while he was imprisoned, "I think I will do as you suggest dear & have some food sent to a fellow in Germany who did me lots of good turns when I was so bad there. He is in the Durhams & after I had my leg amputated he did all he possibly could for myself & the other poor fellow that died after coming to England."⁵⁸ This recognition of service becomes more impressive when Jack admits, "He did everything he possibly could for us... this was all voluntary work on his part."⁵⁹ Jack fully understands he only survived because of the efforts of another man.

Because of the drastic nature of Jack's transition in April of 1915, he becomes an interesting case study. Although he never received a formal education, Jack subscribed to the prevalent gender ideologies that existed at the time. He was influenced by both British and Canadian culture, although the two were not vastly different. His early letters lack emotion, even

⁵⁷ Ibid., Davey files, Feb. 2, 1915

⁵⁸ Ibid., Davey files, Jan 13, 1917

⁵⁹ Ibid., Davey files, Jan 13, 1917

when writing to his love interest. A letter dated December 26, 1914, Jack wrote, “German Taube[?] has dropped a bomb at Dover but no lives were lost & very little damage was done... If it wasn’t for things like that & seeing so many soldiers about one would hardly think that this country was in the biggest war ever known in history.”⁶⁰ After his capture however, the letters were inundated with emotion and reassurances. This language was not new to him; he certainly did not learn these words, phrases, and meanings while in captivity. However, after he was captured he no longer had doubts about dying in combat, and his letters seem to be more relaxed although a foreign censor might have read his letters before mailing them.

To further this notion, I would suggest that in times of distress men would become more open with their feelings. Although this was seen as a feminine characteristic, when one does not know how much longer one might be alive, the fear of being perceived as feminine becomes minimal in comparison to the fear of death. While in the trenches on March 16, 1915, Jack wrote, “They say that in a mile of frontage on our line there are between thirty & forty thousand dead buried so there will be quite a nice smell when the summer comes but I hope we shall be well on the way to Berlin.”⁶¹ He ends this same letter with the sentiments,

“Please remember me to everyone... I will write again as soon as possible... Tons of love & kisses

XX

From Your Ever Loving

XX Jack”⁶²

The letters written by soldiers when they spend time in the trenches are more emotional and forthright than the letters written by those who are out of harms way. While on rotation Jack’s letters to Kate were more passive. He discussed events that occur out side of the trenches, such as church, meals, laundry, showers, and about the letters and items he has received from

⁶⁰ Ibid., Davey files, Dec. 26, 1914

⁶¹ Ibid., Davey files, March 16, 1915

⁶² Ibid., Davey files, March 16, 1915

Kate. On March 18, 1915, Jake wrote, “I think the picture is just lovely of you & thank you so much for it my dear.”⁶³ A few weeks later Jack described a typical Sunday if you were not in the trenches, “We have a church parade (voluntary) every Sunday morning if we are out of the trenches. I didn’t go last Sunday as I had some washing to do.”⁶⁴ These letters have a very different tone than the letters written while in the trenches. On April 11, 1915, Jack wrote about his experiences in the trench, presumably just before he was shot and captured, “We were in for five days this trip & are out now for four day’s rest unless anything happens that we are wanted in before the four day’s (*sic*) are up. We had several casualties this time in from shell fire which was pretty heavy at times.”⁶⁵ Later in the same letter Jack described his experience while being bombed and sitting in a shelter, “There were four of us in it & as we have to wear our equipment the whole time we are in the trenches you can guess how we were packed in & we had to stay there almost fifteen hours out of 24.”⁶⁶ Jack never seemed to complain about his duties, shirk his responsibilities, or abandon his position.

The concept of doing one’s duty was extremely pervasive in the rank and file of both the Canadian and British forces. The idea of letting down a loved one back home, but especially a fellow soldier, was reason enough to keep to your task. Jack communicated this principle in a letter to Kate on February 7, 1915, in which he stated, “Please don’t think I am [? Mopy] dear when you read this but you say you alway’s (*sic*) want me to do my duty & the thought’s of you will alway’s (*sic*) prompt me to do that. I think it must be awful for a soldier to shirk his duty & let some other fellow do it for him & get killed. I should almost feel like a murderer myself if I

⁶³ Ibid., Davey files, March 18, 1915

⁶⁴ Ibid., Davey files, March 31, 1915

⁶⁵ Ibid., Davey files, April 11, 1915

⁶⁶ Ibid., Davey files, April 11, 1915

did a thing like that.”⁶⁷ This clearly demonstrates Jack’s concept of doing one’s duty, and maintaining a high work ethic.

When Jack became a prisoner of war his letters became shorter and less frequent. However, they became more emotionally charged. Jack did not seem to worry about his safety as much as he worried about comforting Kate about his safety. His letters during these years often begin with, “My Dearest Kate just a card to let you know that I am still alive.”⁶⁸ These first lines are an indication of Jack’s concerns. His early letters often began with something mundane such as, “Many thanks for the letters & papers which I received this week”⁶⁹ It is these little nuances that become so important to my research. How Jack changed over the course of the war, and the ways in which his gender identity was slowly reshaped, are representative of the larger cultural phenomenon that was gradual during the pre-war eras and then began to rapidly change as men and women, young and old, married and single, rich and poor, all had to grapple with the changing world around them.

The letters Jack wrote from the hospital in England are the most forthright of the collection. In a letter dated December 26, 1916 Jack openly discussed losing his leg, his memories of the incident, and his hopes for the future. “It will soon be two years since I walked like a human being. It seems a long time to talk about it, but I can picture those fields & imagine I can see the exact spot where I fell as though it only happened yesterday I guess it will be a long day before I forget it.”⁷⁰ Jack also mentioned that he owed the Kaiser a debt of gratitude for bringing Kate closer to him. After surviving several years at war, months as a prisoner of war, losing a leg, and still having to travel from England to Canada, Jack remained optimistic about

⁶⁷ Ibid., Davey files, Feb. 7, 1915

⁶⁸ Ibid., Davey files, June 21, 1915

⁶⁹ Ibid., Davey files, Dec. 17, 1914

⁷⁰ Ibid., Davey files, Dec. 26, 1916

his future, “ I hope the coming year will be a much better one than this year has been for you dear. For myself it promises to be a much better one than any previous one has been.”⁷¹ It is curious to me that Jack was still so lighthearted and positive. He had been through so much, but had survived.

This can be explained by the research conducted by Jane Wendy Gagen. Gagen’s research focuses on soldiers who had limbs amputated during World War One. After reading medical documents and doctors’ first-hand accounts, Gagen came to the conclusion that even under the dire circumstances of war and amputation, men were supposed to remain stoic and internalize their emotions. Jack clearly adhered to this concept as he remains positive, and speaks kindly of his situation. Losing a leg is not an insignificant feature of Jack’s life. As Gagen points out, “The dominant masculine ideal during the early twentieth century sustained masculine dominance precisely because it supported such characteristics as economic independence and risk-taking.”⁷² It now becomes clear why Jack was so concerned with his ability to work. Masculinity was based on one’s ability to provide for oneself, as well as their family.

Gagen furthers her claims by stating that there were no patient consultations before the amputation.⁷³ Jack was never spoken with before his leg was removed. In a postcard to Kate dated, June 21, 1915, Jack is rather curt when explaining his loss of limb to Kate,

My Dearest Kate just a card to let you know that I am still alive but sorry to say that my leg has had to be amputated above the knee after all. I hope it will go on alright now. Am hoping to hear from you this week. It seems ages since I got a line from you Hope you are all getting on alright. Please remember me to all friends Tons of love & kisses for yourself From your loving XXXXXXXXXXXX Jack XXXXXXXXXXXX⁷⁴

⁷¹ Ibid., Davey files, Dec. 26, 1916

⁷² Wendy Jane Gagen. “Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender: Physical Disability and Masculinity during First World War, the Case of J.B. Middlebrook”. (European review of History, Vol 14, No. 4, December 2007), p.526.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 529

⁷⁴ “The Canadian Letters And Images Project.” <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3> Davey files, June 21, 1915

In just a few short sentences Jack communicates many thoughts, emotion, and concerns. He wants to let Kate know he is alive and well, but apologizes for the loss of his leg. Perhaps he is concerned that Kate will think less of him because he is now an amputee. In the five short sentences Jack says “hope” three times. He hopes his leg will be ok, he hopes to hear from Kate, and he hopes that she is getting along all right. Lastly, in his current state, Jack wishes to be remembered to all his friends. Jack recently went through a traumatic experience, and he wants not to be forgotten, even though he is in a hospital thousands of miles away. This postcard is one of the more honest and open examples of Jack’s emotional state, and a stark contrast to his sentiments before he served in the trenches.

As Jack neared the end of his journey, reached Canada, and became convinced that he would survive, and Kate would marry him, his correspondence to her became increasingly emotional and forward. Additionally, because these letters were sent from a hospital and not from battle conditions they were not censored. This, presumably, would have altered the tone of the letters significantly. The letters do not indicate how Jack proposed to Kate but he did, and she accepted. On December 31, 1916, the last day of the year, Jack wrote to Kate saying, “March 11, 1916 was one of my Red Letter days...the day (or rather night) we became engaged. The day of days is to be in 1917 and the sooner it comes along the better because on that day I... cease to just exist and commence to live a real life and one worth living.”⁷⁵ He closes the letter with this moving passage, which I believe sums up Jack’s experiences and opportunities for the future nicely,

Well darling I guess you will think I am feeling a bit mushy by this letter. But I think at this time of the year its usual for a person to look back on the old year & recall incidents that has happened, and to look forward to what the new one has in store. That is just what I am doing as I write this, and I look forward to the New Year full of confidence & hope for what it has in store for me. I hope sweetheart that this will find you in the best of

⁷⁵ Ibid., Davey Files, Dec. 31, 1916

health and that you have as much confidence in the New Year as I have, and that you will never regret the promise you made to me on that Thursday night. Well darling I guess this is all for this letter so will close with tons of love & millions of kisses

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX

From

Your Own Ever Loving Jack”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Ibid., Davey Files, Dec. 31, 1916

-Chapter Four- Darling Kate

Kate's circumstances create another powerful lens to view the effects of war. When the Great War broke out in 1914 Kate was still a young lady, probably in her late teens or early twenties although her age is never revealed. The details of her relationship with Jack are never fully explained but it becomes clear through their correspondence that she intends to remain loyal to Jack even though the two are not married, or even engaged. Although Kate and Jack would eventually marry, the early years of the war created circumstances that allowed Kate to balance the life of a young single woman, and a woman who sent a soldier off to war. Kate remained loyal to Jack throughout the war, but at times she enjoyed attending balls, viewing movies with her friends, and even flirting with other men. As Janet Watson argues in her article, *Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sister: Gender and Class in the First World War*, this was socially acceptable behavior for a single woman, but often came with a mixture of criticism and condemnation.⁷⁷ Kate's social life, attending balls and movies, and seeking male companionship, garnered her unwanted attention.

Women were supposed to join the war effort at some level, whether it was through volunteer nursing, letter writing, organizing food donations, or working in factories. While Kate delicately balanced her personal life between outings with friends and attending formal balls, and her relationship with Jack, she chose to adhere to her ascribed gender identity in regards to her profession. Women were supposed to be nurturing, Kate complied with this by working as a nurse during the war. Throughout her correspondence with Jack, Kate makes references to nursing, especially young children. This was the most significant example of pre-war gender

⁷⁷ Janet Watson, "Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sister: Gender and Class in the First World War Britain". (International History Review, 19:1, 1997), p.33

ideology that Kate followed. It appears that Kate never seemed to stray too far outside the limits of socially acceptable behaviors. Even when she was anxiously awaiting Jack's return, Kate worked as a nurse, wrote to Jack regularly, and worried about Jack's injury. All of these are examples of traditional feminine behaviors.

However, Kate also had a vested interest in Jack, his health and safety, and his eventual, albeit assumed, return. She often wrote to him about his living conditions, "working after your illness, long before you were fit dear! & then you have been training under such wretched conditions it's a wonder you aren't all dead."⁷⁸ She constantly worried about his health; this was exacerbated when Jack was captured and had his leg amputated. All four letters Kate wrote in July of 1915, after Jack's capture in April, inquired about Jack's knee and how he was getting along. On July 2, Kate wrote, "We hope you are not suffering very much with your poor knee."⁷⁹ In a letter dated two weeks later, July 14, 1915, Kate wrote, "Well dearie how is your leg getting on?"⁸⁰ Less than a week later Kate was still inquiring about Jack's knee. On July 18, she communicated her worries, "I hope your knee is improving dear & not so painful as it was."⁸¹ In her last letter of July 1915, Kate reiterated the sentiments of her first letter, "We all hope your poor knee is getting well quickly."⁸² It is unclear if Kate was aware at this point that Jack had his leg amputated at the knee just before July 8 because of the wound he sustained.

Additionally, Kate often inquired if she could send supplies and made socks and cholera belts, which she sent to Jack in the trenches. As early as February of 1915 Kate mentions sock making, "I have not yet finished your socks dear, but will try to send them soon. Guess you'll

⁷⁸ "The Canadian Letters And Images Project." <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3>. Davey files, Feb. 5, 1915

⁷⁹ Ibid., Davey files, July 2, 1915

⁸⁰ Ibid., Davey Files, July 14, 1915

⁸¹ Ibid., Davey Files, July 18, 1915

⁸² Ibid., Davey Files, July 31, 1915

need more in the trenches.”⁸³ All of this was in an effort to uphold the social norms and maintain her ascribed gender identity. Women were the caretakers of men. They were supposed to provide comfort and nourishment to men. Sock making, expressing concerns for Jack’s health and safety, and concerns about his physical well-being are all examples of how Kate acted out her envisioned role of femininity.

When Jack first enlisted he did so without telling Kate. She found out quickly. One of the first letters Jack sent to Kate explained his reasons for enlisting. By way of apologizing, or at least attempting to appease Kate, on August 16, 1914 Jack wrote, “I guess we have to grin and bear it for a while but making up for lost time will be great what say you?” Further down the letter Jack replies to a request from Kate, “Thanks very much for offering to send me anything I require, I may be wanting something after a while”⁸⁴. It becomes apparent early on that Jack feels the need to do his duty, by enlisting, and Kate intends to care for him as much as she can from abroad, sending packages, supplies, and letters. Kate clearly saw it was her obligation to continue looking out for her love interest after he enlisted.

However, Kate did nothing to hide her social lifestyle from Jack. In fact she was rather candid with her admissions to him. In a letter to Jack dated February 16, 1915, Kate spoke of a party she had attended with some of her friends, both male and female. While at the party it seems as though some of the young men were making advances toward Kate and her friends. Kate commented about one of the men at the party, “he is foolish to allow himself to feel so jealous, because it must make him feel very miserable” she added, “It isn’t as if Nicea flirted at all.”⁸⁵ From this we can infer some of Kate’s ideas about socially accepted behaviors for young men and women. Nicea, who also has a soldier in the war, is being praised for not flirting, while

⁸³ Ibid., Davey files, Feb. 5, 1915

⁸⁴ Ibid., Davey files, Aug. 16 1914

⁸⁵ Ibid., Davey files, Feb. 16, 1915

the men at the party are being chastised for feeling jealous. However, it seems that Kate could not resist the temptation of flirting a little. She added in the letter, “I’m afraid I flirted a tiny little bit just to see the funny look come to his face. He quite thinks he should have a tag on me too because you’re away... I knew you wouldn’t mind as long as I had a good time.”⁸⁶ This is a clear example of Kate carefully balancing two identities, that of the single woman, and that of a soldier’s girl. On February 16, 1915 Kate expressed this to Jack, “We all went to a party at Cloverdale Hall last Tuesday... there were about forty five or fifty of us altogether. S. Henson was inclined to stick around Necia & I most of the time, but he was very nice, & I think its his way with all the girls.”⁸⁷ Kate infers that Henson is not flirting with her; he is simply like that with all the girls. I would argue that by attending balls and parties Kate is appearing as though she is single, or at least attempting to enjoy the life of a single girl. In April of 1915 Kate gets invited to another party, “I had an invitation to bring you up here with me, these people don’t know you are at the front. I wish you could have come too.”⁸⁸ The attention she gets from other men, especially soldiers, is unwanted and makes her miss Jack.

Although Kate wrote to Jack on a regular basis -she claims to have written Jack weekly but only eighteen letters are in the Davey files- there are very few facts about her in the letters. The lack of letters is most likely due to the many difficulties of a soldier’s life in the trenches. Jack’s battalion frequently moved, weather ruined papers easily, some letters were never delivered, or returned to Kate, and once Jack was captured some of his belongings could have been confiscated. In the surviving letters Kate frequently discussed work, although, in the letters that survived the war, she never directly states what profession, if any, she participated in. A few times she discusses nursing, even nursing young children, but she never mentions attending

⁸⁶ Ibid., Davey files, Feb. 16, 1915

⁸⁷ Ibid., Davey files, Feb 16, 1915

⁸⁸ Ibid., Davey files, April 4, 1915

school to become a nurse. It can be inferred, though, that Kate did work. She was most likely a nurse at some point, perhaps at an introductory level such as a nurse's aide that required no additional schooling. She also could have either been a nanny or a nurse's aide for adolescent children. We know this because in a letter dated April 16, 1915, Kate worried about the legibility of the letter she was writing, "I was nursing a baby when I started this, so please excuse the scribble."⁸⁹ Again in January of 1916, Kate wrote, "The baby I am going to nurse is in the hospital with pneumonia, & I have to go & take entire charge of him when he comes out." Nursing, especially during World War One, was perceived as the best contribution a woman could make. As Watson highlights in her article, "there is nothing a woman could help country more in doing than mending its men."⁹⁰ Although Kate was apparently a nurse for young children, the tasks and duties were still important. Her position as a nurse reinforced the traditional notion of women as nurturers. Even though Kate was an independent woman, she did not live with her parents, she still fulfilled duties that were traditionally gendered as female.

Kate never joined the Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) or any other official organization that contributed directly to the war effort. She did, however, have friends who were VADs. Her friend Bee joined the VADs in 1916, and all Kate mentioned about it was that Bee joined too late to see Jack in the Quebec hospital upon his return. Instead, Kate took it upon herself to ensure Jack had everything he needed. Kate focused her attention on one man, Jack, often asking if he needed additional supplies, even when her stockpiles were dwindling, "Many people were without food and coal, one family had to chop up a bedstead for firewood. Will went to town yesterday & brought us a few papers back. I will try & send you one."⁹¹ The supply

⁸⁹ Ibid., Davey files, April 16, 1915

⁹⁰ Sylvia Beale to Helen Beale, 16 Aug. 1915, Beale Family Papers

⁹¹ "The Canadian Letters And Images Project." <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3> Davey files, July 18, 1915

of goods from Kate to Jack was constant. After several weeks of misinformation and questions about Jack's whereabouts after his capture, Kate received a letter sent from Jack on May 2 regarding his circumstances, to which she replied on June 4, 1915,

You can imagine how anxious we have been to hear from you, as you were reported missing after I received your last letter, dated April 22nd & this is the first news we have had of you since. I have written to you every week as usual & sent you a lot of papers too, but I don't suppose you would be allowed to have those anyway. I also sent the other pair of socks & a few cigarettes April 30th so if you haven't received them they will be at "headquarter."⁹²

Additionally, eight weeks later on July 31, 1915, Kate wrote, "We are waiting to know if we can send you tobacco or food so I hope there will be a letter from you soon."⁹³ It is unclear at this point that Kate knew just how dire Jack's situation was. On June 7, Jack sent a letter to Kate in an attempt to comfort her, "My Dearest Kate Just a line to let you know that I am still alive. [?] it getting [?] but pretty peaceful at times. Shall be glad when I can get about a bit as the time drags so when one is in bed with nothing to do. Please don't send any papers as we are not allowed them."⁹⁴ No information is given regarding Jack location or health conditions, as these letters would have been read by German authorities.

These are examples of precise moments where Kate conveyed her fears about Jack's health and safety, his supply level, and his general well being. However, from the outset Kate made it very clear that she expected Jack to serve his country, do his duty, and not seek an honorable discharge. As early as January of 1915, Jack began writing to Kate about applying for a discharge. His thoughts and concerns were covered in the previous chapter, but it is equally important to register Kate's reaction. January 28, 1915, Kate, rather bluntly, responded to Jack's inquiry, "No: dear I certainly would not like to hear of you applying for an honourable (*sic*)

⁹² Ibid., Davey files, May 2, 1915

⁹³ Ibid., Davey files, June 4, 1915

⁹⁴ Ibid., Davey files, June 7, 1915 (the question marks indicate words that could not be deciphered by the individual who scanned and typed the original letters)

discharge, it would look as though you had ‘cold feet,’ & I want to feel proud of you when you come back.”⁹⁵ This notion of ‘cold feet’ only appears this one time in Kate’s correspondence, but she makes her expectations very straightforward. It was certainly clear what was expected of men during the war, and as Desmond Morton argues in his book, *Fight or Pay*, women who remained home had a myriad of tasks and expectations.⁹⁶ Women were supposed to “Put the pay into patriot” which meant donate time, money, or supplies, volunteer your services, or work in the factories.

It is also clear from the correspondence that Kate was proud of Jack for serving his country. She subscribed to the idea that men are the protectors of society; Jack was doing his part by serving in the war. On February 5, 1915, Kate explained to Jack that she was proud of his duty and possible promotion “Am very pleased to hear about the promotion & hope you get it alright, I feel quite proud of my soldier boy already.”⁹⁷ It is not known whether Jack was promoted or not but it is clear that Kate approves of his role. She is so approving, in fact, that she goes on to say “when you (*sic*) B.C. Reg’st get into the field you’ll give them pepper I hope!”⁹⁸ At this early stage in the war Kate advocated violence and fighting; it is only later on, when she became more aware of all the death and destruction the war causes, that she changed her opinion. In later letters it became clear that Kate disapproved of the senseless killing. Just two short months later, and a few days before Jack was injured, Kate communicated this sentiment to Jack when she relayed the words of her brother, “I had a letter from my brother the other day & he

⁹⁵ Ibid., Davey files, July 31, 1915

⁹⁶ Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers’ Families in the Great War*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), p.117.

⁹⁷ "The Canadian Letters And Images Project." <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3> Davey files Feb. 5, 1915

⁹⁸ Ibid., Davey files, April 4, 1915

certainly is sick & tired of the trenches, & referred to the war as “devilish work” & “dam biz.”⁹⁹ From this point on Kate’s primary focus becomes Jack’s safety.

On a few occasions Kate imagined herself in the war, wondering how she would tackle the circumstances of combat and trench warfare. In February 16, 1915, she told Jack, “How I wish I could be there with you to help! (but maybe I’d hinder).”¹⁰⁰ Combined with the information from her brother, Kate’s concerns for Jack grow, “I guess it is more horrible than you have ever imagined, my brother says it is terrible at the Base, so it must be worse in the trenches.”¹⁰¹ After moments like this Kate realizes how awful Jack’s situation truly is and acknowledges that she would not be able to handle life in the trenches. A few months after hearing from her brother, Kate again wrote to Jack about life in the trenches. The letter of April 16, 1915, states “doesn’t it make you wish you had never gone when you see all the dreadful slaughter that is going on? I’m afraid the very thoughts of so many dead buried around would be enough to make me a coward.”¹⁰² This is a stark contrast to her earlier letters. In February of 1915, Kate wrote to Jack exclaiming, “Gee, but it’s grand to be a man! I’d be right on the spot if I was one. Do you think I’d pass muster if I donned the kilties?”¹⁰³ Although Kate subscribes to the gender ideology that men are the protectors of society, the war is challenging this ideology. In just a few short months her perceptions and attitudes change.

It is clear that Kate’s knowledge of the war comes from Jack and her brother, but also from other women and local papers. Occasionally Kate would read one of Jack’s letters in the paper, “One of the postcards you sent to your mother (dated May 14th) was reprinted in this

⁹⁹ Ibid., Davey files, April 4, 1915

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Davey files, Feb. 16, 1915

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Davey files, Feb. 16, 1915

¹⁰² Ibid., Davey files, April 16, 1915

¹⁰³ Ibid., Davey files, Feb. 5, 1915

morning's "Colonist," it stated that it had been copied from an English paper."¹⁰⁴ It seems as though the recipients, as a form of bragging, gave some letters to the press. Sometimes soldiers encouraged this practice, but it was more often actively discouraged, whether out of modesty or because they did not agree with the way the local press was presenting the war. Furthermore, bragging about one's role or duty was not considered manly. Men were supposed to be stoic in this regard as well; complete your tasks, achieve results, but do not boast or praise yourself.

So where does Kate's concept of gender identity originate? The ideas and sentiments that she writes about in her letters; men protecting the country and performing their duty, the concept of being honorable and not backing down, women taking care of men by sending needed supplies, letters, and love, women nursing children and wounded soldiers, and men being proud to fight and women being proud of their men, these concepts were all disseminated through several different media outlets. War propaganda could certainly be held responsible for encouraging men to fight, but propaganda was not being produced until the war had already started. The argument of Desmond Morton in *Fight or Pay* can only truly account for the years after the war had begun. The Canadian slogan coined by Sir Herbert Aims "If you cannot put the "I" into fight, put the "pay" into patriotism" properly sums up the concept the Canadian government was striving for.¹⁰⁵ But again, this only accounts for the years at war. Kate and Jack were just two of the millions of people who fought and sacrificed, each in their own ways, in order to protect the culture they came from.

As Jack got closer and closer to returning home, it became apparent to Kate and Jack both that their relationship would be a lasting one. It was not until Kate's final letter to Jack, dated January 13, 1917, that she hinted at a larger commitment, "You may be interested to hear

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Davey files, July 14, 1915

¹⁰⁵ Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers' Families in the Great War*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), p. 89.

that Jimmie has taken to calling me Katie Davey - sounds rather cute don't you think?"¹⁰⁶

Additionally, Kate wrote to Jack about being physically affectionate, "Mollie asked George yesterday what you (Jack) would have when you came back & he said some "sloppy-sloppy" with Auntie Kate. When he kisses his Daddy we always say "sloppy-sloppy" so you see what he means don't you?"¹⁰⁷ From this final letter we see their story coming to an unexpectedly happy end at last. Jack has miraculously survived the war and Kate has been faithful while he served his country. The sacrifices they both made might finally start paying off.

While Jack struggled with his self-identity, and the obstacles affiliated with being an amputee, Kate barely acknowledged his deformity. Jack must have felt an overwhelming sensation of inferiority and loss of manliness because he was no longer fully able to walk without support, his future was unclear, and his ability to work was questioned. It is clear from the correspondence that Jack is more concerned with the loss of his leg than Kate was. In the same final letter to Jack, Kate inscribed, "I was so pleased to hear that you had had the first fitting of your leg & I am anxious to hear how they are getting along with it."¹⁰⁸ Outside of this Kate makes little reference to Jack's leg. It is unclear as to whether Kate believed that the less she mentioned it the less Jack might be affected by it. Perhaps Kate rarely mentioned it because she did not mind that he no longer had both legs. Or perhaps Kate was just so pleased that Jack was one of the returning soldiers that she accepted him in any form. Regardless, Kate and Jack were reunited and finally wed.

From early on Kate and Jack both wrote to each other optimistically about his chances for survival. Never once, in any of the fifty-nine letters exchanged between the two of them, does

¹⁰⁶ "The Canadian Letters And Images Project." <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections.php?warid=3> Davey files, Jan. 13, 1917

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Davey files, Jan. 13, 1917

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Davey files, Jan 13, 1917

either one ever mention the possibility of Jack not surviving. Furthermore, neither party ever discussed the possibility of Kate leaving Jack. From the outset it was clearly assumed that Jack would return, and when he came home Kate would be there. This is not to say that neither side had their doubts about the other. Certainly Jack must have been jealous, confused, and even angry when Kate wrote to him about attending parties and flirting with other men. And Kate must have had her doubts about Jack's survival, especially after he had been captured, but neither Jack nor Kate ever openly acknowledged this to the other so we can only speculate.

From the time Jack enlisted and Kate wrote her first letter until Jack arrived back in England as part of the prisoner exchange there are four letters in which Kate makes reference, or blatantly states that she believed Jack would return to her. The first letter is dated February 5, 1915 and states, "in the end I know you will come out on top, so cheer up & think about all the good times we'll have when you come back."¹⁰⁹ This letter was addressed to a military base in France while Jack was serving in the trenches. The next letter, dated just a week later and mailed to the same location restates Kate's feelings, "we are watching for you to come back, as I bet you will do."¹¹⁰ When Jack finally joined the fighting Kate's letters turn from hinting at his return to directly stating it, "I do wish you were here so that I could nurse you, but never mind I'll nurse you when you come back, won't that be nice, eh?"¹¹¹ The final letter, dated July 31, 1915, is the most forthright of Jack and Kate's situation, "Life seems full of tangles for us just now, but we'll pull through them somehow, maybe we shall appreciate the brighter days more when they do come."¹¹² Kate was correct in her assumptions; somehow both she and Jack pulled through and survived the war.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Davey files, Feb. 5, 1915

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Davey files, Feb. 11, 1915

¹¹¹ Ibid., Davey files, June 11, 1915

¹¹² Ibid., Davey files, July 31, 1915

Chapter Five

-Conclusion-

Using one person, or couple, as a lens to view such momentous events can be difficult, constraining, and make room for gaps in the research. Additionally, the events that Jack and Kate experienced, both together and apart, do not represent the experiences of all soldiers and loved ones left behind. Certainly not all men who went to war experienced the same events as Jack, nor would they have come from the same background, had the same level of education, or had the same convictions about duty and honor. However, by focusing the research around a few individuals, we can extrapolate their experiences and make broader assumptions about the ideology of war, gender, the roles that men and women were assigned, and if the gender identities were challenged by the war.

Reading the first-hand accounts, and coupling the experiences of Jack and Kate with the research of other historians, gives me the opportunity to show how Jack exemplified masculinity before the war started, and how he began to challenge certain aspects of the gender dichotomy because of his personal experiences. Jack saw the devastation of war, and although he remained positive and optimistic, even under such horrible conditions, the tone and content of his letters between 1914 and 1917 did in fact change. Initially Jack was reserved in regards to his feelings and emotions. His early letters to Kate are bland, and lack genuine warmth. Over time, and I would argue because of his experiences at war, Jack began to communicate his feelings more readily and speak candidly with Kate about his hopes, concerns, and dreams.

It is also important to note that while Jack began to challenge some of the gendered social norms, he adhered to others throughout personal experiences during the war. Jack remained steadfast in his belief to perform his duty, conduct himself honorably, and face opposition with

stoicism. There are several letters in which Jack openly discussed doing his duty, not letting the other men down, and especially, not letting another man die in his place. To Jack, this last action was equivalent to death. Throughout the war Jack remained honorable, he fought for his country, was willing to sacrifice himself, although it never came to that, and performed his tasks diligently. Furthermore, Jack was always honest, respectable, forthright, and considerate of Kate. Even though his early letters were not overly emotional, after he was captured and then amputated his correspondence became much more candid and open.

Kate is a perfect example of socialized female gender identity. Throughout the war she wrote to Jack regularly, made him socks and other items, and sent care packages with newspapers and tobacco. From the beginning of the war Kate assumed the role of nurturer and held this position throughout all three years of Jack's service. Additionally, Kate gained employment as a nurse, an extension of her nurturing role. However, Kate also delicately balanced her obligations to Jack with her desires to act as the young, and presumably attractive, young lady that she was. Kate frequently attended balls, where she would meet and sometimes flirt with other men. She also went on large group outings to picnics with friends and other couples. Additionally, she ventured out with her girlfriends and viewed movies and attended other social events like dances. All of this was socially acceptable behavior for a young lady, although some of her actions garnered her unwanted attention from potential suitors. Kate always filled the role of nurturer and I would argue that her pre-war conceptions about gender and femininity might have been challenged but never overturned.

In conclusion, Jack and Kate typified young, working-class individuals who subscribed to the prevalent pre-war gender dichotomy. By examining the experiences of both Jack and Kate it becomes clear that while some steadfast rules regarding gender remained the same throughout

the war, other rules were challenged. Jack and Kate do not speak for every soldier who went to war or for every sweetheart who remained at home. Their experiences are individualistic but can be representative of a larger challenge to the assumed gender norms of pre-war Canada and England. The gender dichotomy that was established during the Victorian and Edwardian eras was already being challenged before the start of the war; World War One only accelerated the pace.

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