Don’t Be Content With Content:
Crowdsourcing as Promotion and Engagement

Adam Strohm
Digital Initiatives Librarian
Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology
Whether you are an expert, or an enthusiast of Civil War history, you can aid research and enrich the historical record by transcribing these handwritten letters and reviewing the work of other transcribers. For more detailed instructions, see the transcription instructions and tips.

Read about this project, then click on a letter below to begin transcribing, or browse the collections to learn more about their contents.

This transcription project was launched in conjunction with the exhibition, “Home Front: Daily Life in the Civil War North,” on view at the Newberry from September 2013 to March 2014.

Carlos W. Colby Letters (transcription Complete) (Browse collection)

John D. Beach Letters (Browse collection)

Edward W. Curtis Letters (transcription complete) (Browse collection)

George Deal Letters (transcription complete) (Browse collection)
Richard Realf to Laura B. Merritt, Loudon, TN, April 16, 1864

Newberry Library, Case MS 10034

Captain's Office. 88th Ill. Inf.


For a little while good bye—good night. We March to-morrow morning, getting back into the Department of the Cumberland, from which we have so long been detached. I am glad of this, for it will lighten my labors, seeing that hitherto, by reasons of belonging to one Department and being stationed in another, I have had to render in our Regimental returns and reports to both. We camp at Charleston, where I hope to find letters from you.
Our Banner in the Sky, Frederic Edwin Church, 1861
Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1992.27
Newberry's Civil War exhibit moves beyond the battles

Library's exhibit offers fresh, engaging perspective

September 25, 2013 | Steve Johnson | Tribune reporter

In the landscape painting "Hunter Mountain, Twilight," context is everything.

It was painted in 1866, after the nation, too, had been denuded by the Civil War. And the artist, Sanford Robinson Gifford, had served in the Union Army and lost a brother in the war.

So the purple twilight means more than just the dimming of a day in New York's Catskill Mountains. And the stumps in a field that occupy the image's foreground are more that just the remnants of felled trees.

Sombre and mournful, the painting is the powerful closing image of a new exhibition at the Newberry Library, "Home Front: Daily Life in the Civil War North," that itself paints a nuanced picture of what the war was like for those not directly involved in battle or statesmanship.

When we think of the Civil War, it is often in terms of blues and grays battling grimly in a field or, thanks to recent popular culture, of President Abraham Lincoln steering the nation through it.

But "Home Front," opening Friday, delivers a fresh and thoroughly engaging perspective.

It uses paintings of the period, scores of documents from the Newberry's trove, the era's patriotic sheet music and new recordings of some of the songs, and objects ranging from a woman's dress showing the seepage of military uniforms into fashion to a Mythicon, a postwar Milton Bradley toy that encouraged children to revisit grisly scenes from the conflict via a budded, box-mounted scroll.

The historical library, in organizing the show in conjunction with Chicago's Terra Foundation for American Art, wanted to tell a Civil War story that visitors might not be so familiar with, said Daniel Greene, exhibit co-curator and the Newberry's vice president for research and academic programs.

Separate sections address the cotton trade in advance of the war, the concurrent American Indian Wars in the role of women and how the war played out in Chicago.

"What this show shows is that even if you're at a distance from war, you are intimately bound with it," Greene said.

And if that happens to make you think about the distance we've had in contemporary America from our wars, well, that's just fine with Greene and co-curator Peter John Brownlee, the Terra Foundation's associate curator.

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Steve Johnson, “Newberry’s Civil War Exhibit Moves Beyond the Battles,” Chicago Tribune (Chicago, IL), September 25, 2013
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James and Henry Patterson to “dear ones at home,” Springfield, MO, Sept. 25, 1862, Newberry Library, Case MS 10025
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Thank You!

Adam Strohm
astrohm@iit.edu

The Civil War in Letters
publications.newberry.org/civilwarletters

DIY History
diyhistory.lib.uiowa.edu