

1-2016

# World War I Ephemera for Everyone

Rebecca Stowe

*Illinois State University*, [becksto@gmail.com](mailto:becksto@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/upen>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Stowe, Rebecca, "World War I Ephemera for Everyone" (2016). *Undergraduate Publications - English*. 1.  
<https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/upen/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ISU ReD: Research and eData. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Publications - English by an authorized administrator of ISU ReD: Research and eData. For more information, please contact [ISURed@ilstu.edu](mailto:ISURed@ilstu.edu).

Contact Eric Willey at [emwille@ilstu.edu](mailto:emwille@ilstu.edu) if you would like to guest author a column or have a good idea to share.

## World War I Ephemera for Everyone

By Rebecca Stowe, Illinois State University

With the centennial of World War I, museums and archives around the world are commemorating the event with exhibits in galleries both physical and virtual. Both online and offline, the way we look at World War I has shifted. World War I's political and military significance is no longer the only scholarly focus; an interest is growing in the lives of the soldiers themselves, whether British or German, American or French. People want to know what daily life was like in the trenches, what sort of letters soldiers wrote home, and what soldiers listened to or read to pass the time. American and British archives have caught on and are calling for the general public to donate items and ephemera and to share their World War I stories. This is creating a more comprehensive academic understanding of those who were caught in one of the bloodiest wars in history.

While the Library of Congress (LOC) is known for having the second-largest collection of books in the world, it has moved with the times by digitizing dozens of its collections and putting them online. Three of the LOC's online collections relate directly to World War I. The collection that provides perhaps the most insight into the lives of World War I soldiers is ***Stars and Stripes: The American Soldiers' Newspaper of World War I, 1918–1919*** ([memory.loc.gov/ammem/sgphtml/sashtml/sashome.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/sgphtml/sashtml/sashome.html)). *Stars and Stripes* was the newspaper of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), which consisted of American troops overseas. The paper was published in France and distributed to US troops through a network of trains, automobiles, and motorcycles. The eight-page weekly paper comprised updates on the war, accounts of German atrocities, tips for "Doughboys" (slang for American soldiers), poems, jokes, and cartoons. At its peak, the "official newspaper of the AEF, by and for the soldiers of the AEF" had a circulation of 526,000 readers. These readers were encouraged to submit their own art and writing. The complete 71-week run of the newspaper between 1918 and 1919 is available to view for free.

Another collection is **World War I Sheet Music**, the LOC's assortment of over 14,000 pieces of sheet music, most of it from 1917 and 1918 (when the United States was actively involved in the war). Songs like George M. Cohan's "Over There" and his "Give My Regards

to Broadway" inspired American soldiers to fight for the homes they left behind. Other popular hits such as the peppy "K-K-K-Katy (The Stuttering Song)" and Irving Berlin's humorous "Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning!" can be viewed at [loc.gov/collections/world-war-i-sheet-music](http://loc.gov/collections/world-war-i-sheet-music).

The LOC's website also includes the Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, which features **Posters: World War I**. This collection consists of about 1,900 posters created between 1914 and 1920. World War I was one of the first wars during which mass propaganda was used to fight enemies in an entirely different way from the war on the battlefields. Posters became powerful tools that were informative, inspirational, and persuasive to both those in the trenches and those at home. The topics of posters in possession of the LOC range from recruitment to rationing, from advertisements to warnings. Among the most famous is the recruitment poster featuring Lord Kitchener staring down and pointing to the viewer, which later inspired the iconic Uncle Sam "I Want You" poster of World War II. Digital versions of these posters are accessible at [loc.gov/pictures/collection/wwipos](http://loc.gov/pictures/collection/wwipos).

When the United States became involved in the Great War in 1917, all American males who were born between 1872 and 1900 had to register for the draft. The **National Archives at Atlanta** (NAA) has about 24 million of these registration cards that men were legally required to fill out. These draft registration cards are a boon for any academic researcher or genealogist, whether official or aspiring, since they list details about where the applicant lived, his occupation, his race, his immigration status, and his next of kin. The NAA's records include cards from all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Digitized draft registration cards of "famous, infamous and intriguing people" can be viewed at [archives.gov/atlanta/wwi-draft](http://archives.gov/atlanta/wwi-draft). Anyone can browse through draft cards of actors and entertainers (such as Jimmy Cagney, Charlie Chaplin, Harry Houdini, and Fred Astaire) or literary figures (such as Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, Sinclair Lewis, and Edgar Rice Burroughs). Other pop culture figures include Louis Armstrong, Babe Ruth, and Al Capone.

(Continued on page 22)





*This sketch by David Jones is from the First World War Poetry Digital Archive, University of Oxford ([www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/](http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/)); (c) The Royal Welch Fusiliers Museum / The David Jones Literary Estate.*

the war, recordings of music, and interviews with military officials.

This collection overlaps with Oxford's other World War I collection, the **First World War Poetry Digital Archive** ([www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/](http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/)), which features digital versions of memorabilia from poets like Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, David Jones, Isaac Rosenberg, and Vera Brittain. Sketches by David Jones show his perspective on life in the trenches. Vera Brittain's poems emulate the heartbreaking work of being a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) nurse. Letters from Siegfried Sas-

soon and postcards from Wilfred Owen give intimate glimpses into their personal lives.

With the rise of social media and the advancement of technology in archival science, ordinary people with access to the Internet can find out more about what life was like for their relatives almost 100 years ago. They are also able to contribute their own family stories and pieces of history for everyone's benefit. Online archival resources such as these encourage community engagement with historical ephemera that is unprecedented and certain to change our perspectives on archival and historical research.



*This David Jones sketch, "Rats Shot," is from The First World War Poetry Digital Archive, University of Oxford ([www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/](http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/)); (c) [The Royal Welch Fusiliers Museum / The David Jones Literary Estate].*



## ARCHIVAL PRODUCTS



### Preserve + Conserve + **Quality**

It's who we are, and what we deliver.

At Archival Products, we care about preserving your most important items. That's why we've developed an extensive product line to meet virtually every preservation need. All hand-crafted by our dedicated team.

866-658-1083 | [info@archival.com](mailto:info@archival.com) | [www.archival.com](http://www.archival.com)