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## Choice Poetry: Valiant Manhood's Flinch

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# Choice Poetry: Valiant Manhood's Flinch

## Abstract

Throughout the war, the front page of Gettysburg's newspapers, regardless of your political stripe, had an evergreen column. Poetry graced the upper left corner each week. Sometimes raucous, often love-lorn, chiefly patriotic, the poems must have buoyed many a Pennsylvanian spirit as America floundered in the depth of Civil War.

Most of the poems were mainstream schmaltz, passed from paper to paper as each editor read a line or two he liked and thought his readers might appreciate. The poems spread like a particularly odd malignant cancer from organ to organ. [*excerpt*]

## Keywords

CW150, Gender History, Gettysburg, interp examples, Newspapers, Poetry, Rudy

## Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Social History | United States History

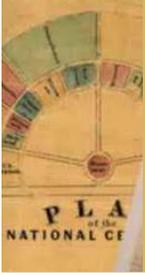
## Comments

*Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public* is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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# Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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## Choice Poetry: Valiant Manhood's Flinch

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2013

Throughout the war, the front page of Gettysburg's newspapers, regardless of your political stripe, had an evergreen column. Poetry graced the upper left corner each week. Sometimes raucous, often love-lorn, chiefly patriotic, the poems must have buoyed many a Pennsylvanian spirit as America floundered in the depth of Civil War.

Most of the poems were mainstream schmaltz, passed from paper to paper as each editor read a line or two he liked and thought his readers might appreciate. The poems spread like a particularly odd malignant cancer from organ to organ.

But every so often, there appeared a unique poem. Usually they were headed with the terse words, "For the Adams Sentinel," or "For the Compiler." In the last few days of March 1863, the *Sentinel* ran one of [those simple, local poems](#) on its front page.

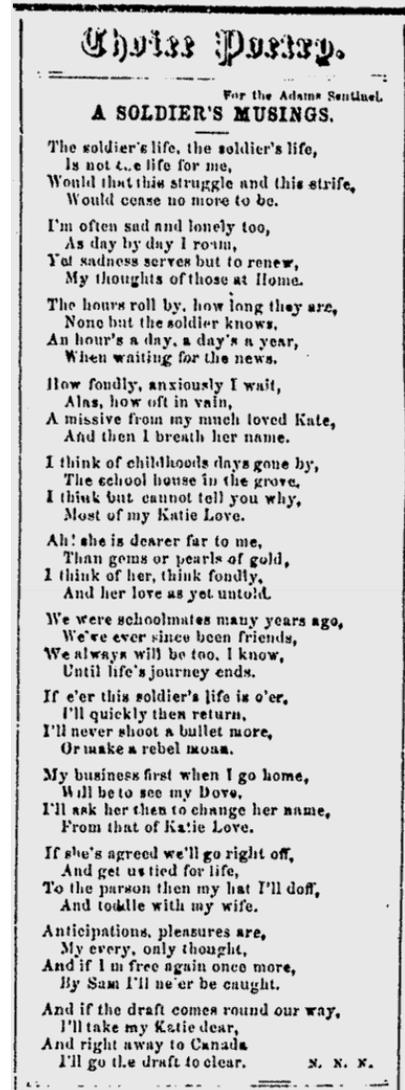
The poem was simply titled *A Soldier's Musings*, written from the perspective (and perhaps pen) of some boy wearing a blue uniform and fighting in the Federal ranks. The first lines shake with simple power: "The soldier's life, the soldier's life / is not the life for me." It flies in the face of every patriotic ditty and rousing air we remember from the war.

This particular soldier seems depressed as he wrote that he is, "often sad and lonely too." It was love that strained his heart along with the perpetual boredom. "Alas, how oft in vain, / A missive from my much loved Kate, / and then I breath her name," he lamented.

But the soldier was quite certain of what all this love-sickness called for. "If e'er this soldier's life is o'er," he pined, "I'll quickly then return, / I'll never shoot a bullet more, / Or make a rebel moan." Love called not for violence or killing. Love called not for death and destruction. Love called for the opposite.

"I'll ask her then," the soldier resolved, "to change her name, / From that of Katie Love."

And what of war?



"And if I'm free again once more," the soldier-poet declares, "By Sam I'll ne'er be caught." If conscription would seek to separate their happy home, to drive a wedge between soldier and Kate, this man's choice was quite clear and certain: "'I'll take my Katie dear, / And right away to Canada, / I'll go the draft to clear."

Such was the valour of one Gettysburgian, one possibly-imagined, possibly-real American man in the face of a long and interminable war. Discretion would ultimately prove for him the better part of valour. And love would conquer war.