

Finding a Home Away from Home

Leading to a Home of My Own

Based on letters written by

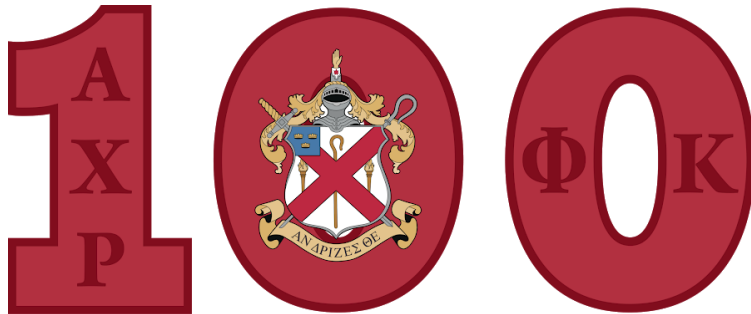
Gerald E Dickson

1914-1920

Alpha Chi Rho, University of Illinois

Edited by his son, Jim Dickson '52

for the



PHI KAPPA CHAPTER CENTENNIAL
ON THE ILLINOIS CAMPUS SINCE 1916

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Finding a Home Away from Home

Gerald E Dickson

Preface

This is a story of Dad's life from 1914 to 1920 based on letters he wrote to his parents--weekly for two years, less often thereafter.

He enrolled in the Univ. of IL Sept 1914, pledged a local fraternity, Chi Delta, Feb '16 and became a brother that May, the same time Chi Delta became part of national Alpha Chi Rho.

His Junior year was interrupted April '17 to work for a year on the family farm and then 17 months WW I as an Infantry 2nd Lt . He returned to the Univ. of IL Sept '19 and completed studies Jan '20.

Background

To understand a story it helps to have background. Dad's life began on a farm five miles from Hampshire, ten miles west of Elgin. A look at the farmhouse bespeaks of poverty but it was an age when things were what you made of them.



The Dickson home where Dad was born in 1895. The house was built in 1850 with an addition added in the late 1800s

Dad's grandfather, James, came from Binghamton, N.Y. in a covered wagon in 1849 with his father Edgar Wallace. (E.W.),

Mother Lucetta and six other siblings. They settled on 222 acres of rich IL farm land. James was not literate but Lucetta taught all the children to read and write.

E.W. married Margaret (called Mag or Maggie) Smith. A child Floyd, was born in 1882. The next four pregnancies were sons who died before reaching the age of two. Dad was born in 1895.

Floyd went to Hampshire high school and on to the U of IL for a brief period. Poor preparation in a small high school was a factor in Floyd leaving college. Dad's parents were firm that he would have a good background so he commuted 10 miles to Elgin High for four years of high school.



In 1907-09 Floyd and Dad worked with E.W. to make cement blocks and to build this house in the Village of Hampshire.

Dad's parents had high expectations when he enrolled in college in the fall of 1914. Dad had the confidence of one who had gone to a large high school but the insecurity of a small town boy. He was committed to not letting his parents down.

The venture began with train rides to Chicago and Champaign.

Freshman Year—1914 to 1915

9/20/1914 Room & Board

“...Arrived here at 9:45 p.m.. I inquired the way to the YMCA and found that it was located on the east side of Champaign so took a car there and applied for a room. The young fellows were a fine open-hearted lot and the college spirit certainly predominates here; unless a fellow refused to unbend he can certainly enjoy himself and make friends.

The next morning had breakfast in the Y cafeteria and started out to look for a room after obtaining addresses at the Y. Single rooms rent from \$8 to \$10 per month while double rooms were from \$16 to \$20 per month with washing extra. Board was priced at \$4.50 to \$5 per week at the lunch clubs or commissaries.

Saw an ad of the Thai lunch club at \$4.25/wk so came over here and found that it would start Monday, also that she had a south east room for rent at \$11 (per month for 2). As it is only about a block from the armory and Illinois field, I paid my half of the room rent and told her that I would pick my own roommate.

I went back to the Y and fell in with a young fellow named Al from CO. who had just arrived. We made arrangements to bunk together. I asked him if he smoked or drank. Said he didn't.

We have been finding that we can get rid of the coin fast enough so are trying to cut down. One can hardly turn around without costing but meals are the worst. It takes from 20 to 25 cents to get something to eat.”

9/18/1914

Picking a Major

“Have been doing some thinking since I left you. Have almost decided that I didn't want to throw away an extra \$18 just for drafting instruments. So I may switch lineup of studies to take in Rhetoric, Economics, Geography etc. in place of drawing and shop work.”

9/23/1914

Friends and Food

“President James (talked) today at the freshman convocation. He was lecturing upon being “sore”, and told us if we wanted to be

sore we could but we would be much better off if we got over it. Pres. James said that Illinois has the best university and the best-looking freshman class of any college in the U.S.

My roommate Al is a walking joke book himself and we certainly keep the fellows at the table a-roaring; then, when we let it run down, someone else starts up."

9/27/1914

Campus Life

"I don't miss the time (*at home*) as there are so many fellows here of my age, also many petti-coated ones too, but I have yet to see a pretty one of the latter.

"Best School"

If anymore of the natives up there (*home*) ask if I am lonesome or what course I am taking tell them that this is the best school in the country and if they don't believe it come down and find out."

9/29/1914

ROTC

"Monday night we had our first military drill; there were five companies of us freshmen, who are called the "awkward" squad, and several companies of sophomores.

Dean of Men

Tonight I listened to a lecture by Dean Clark, Dean of Men, upon Physical Training. He talked to us like a father, told us of how much responsibility was resting on our shoulders and gave us some valuable helpful information."

10/11/1914

Tough Rhetoric Teacher

"No matter how much work one does here it can never equal the standard set by the teachers. Our Rhetoric teacher is a fright in that respect. She started right in the first day by lecturing us upon our grade of work.

Said that she didn't consider we did good work at the beginning of the semester. If we did, we belonged in a more advanced class, so they would start grading us low at first, probably so we could appreciate good marks at the end of the semester. Well from the looks of the grades we've been getting, I guess she's going to keep her promise."

10/28/1914

Grades

"This morning I went over to the Dean's office and received my grades for this month's work and sure got buried. Since I've been down here it seems that I never knew what studying was. I put in more time on Rhetoric than any other two subjects but it doesn't seem to do any good. However here's hoping that the teacher will be more tender-hearted next report.

Following are the marks: Economics 95; Rhetoric 76; Chemistry 85; Mathematics 95; German 92; Average 88.6

Gee but today seems like a funeral as all of us freshmen have our marks and from the looks of some of them I guess I was extremely lucky."

11/1/1914

Report Cards

"By the reports from the dean's office more than one fourth of the freshmen were flunked. We used to get pretty good marks in High School; we are beginning to find that was different from college. However there is a big satisfaction in knowing that we are in a good school.

Football Game with MN

Although the game was played in Minneapolis nearly 500 miles away, about three thousand of us were over in the bleachers in Illinois field yesterday and watched the game on "paper".

Telegraphic reports were given of every play and a chart showed the movement of the ball so we enjoyed the game nearly as much as tho we were in Minneapolis. When Illinois battled the Gophers 0 to 0 for three quarters of the game everyone was on edge and when the first touchdown was made by Clark he was "ch-heed" the same as though he was out on the field in front of us."

11/5/1914

Habits

"We are getting along as well as ever and counting the days until Thanksgiving comes. As to behavior that you spoke of in your last letter, well it's about the same as ever. I haven't formed any bad habits yet such as smoking, chewing, drinking, etc. and I believe I have nearly lost my knowledge of the profane language."

12/6/1914

New Armory

"Thursday being Illinois Day classes were dismissed and we cadets were called out for a review in the new armory for the benefit of Gov. Dunne. There were over two thousand cadets. The column four abreast reached from the new armory to the old so that when the band was approaching the new armory the last of the cadets were just leaving Illinois Field about half a mile away.

Dancing

Next Friday night is the Junior Prom and Saturday night another Cadet Hop. Have been thinking about taking some dancing lessons and learning how to dance as it sure comes in handy and a person gets in with a bunch which otherwise he would fail to meet."

12/14/1914

Cadet Hop/Rhetoric Teacher

"We went to the cadet hop. Nearly all of the girls and a few of the fellows in my Rhetoric class were there, also my Rhetoric teacher. And say she is some dancer too. I had never imagined that she was that near human before. I'll have to take a couple more dancing lessons, go to the next cadet hop, and see if I can't raise that Rhetoric mark.

We managed to have a pretty fair time (*at the Cadet Hop*). All of us cadets were supposed to wear our uniforms, and made a fine appearance, to say nothing of the full dress suits of the instructors, and the evening gowns of the fair sex. The major and his wife stood in the receiving line to greet us and inspect our appearance, and the whole affair was conducted in the same spirit that all of the university functions are."

1/5/1915

Landlady

"I arrived back (*from Christmas vacation*) but when I arrived I found a set of badly disgruntled fellows. To begin with the old lady took our big 100-watt electric lights and replaced them with measly little 40-watt lamps. She says we can have them when we go away.

Our room got awfully cold again yesterday although the weather is lots warmer and all the other rooms were as warm as summer. So I journeyed around and closed all the other registers and in a short time the cold air was replaced by warm...I'll be glad when we get out of here."

1/10/1915

Moved

"It is Sunday morning and we have about finished settling in our new quarters. It costs somewhat more than the other one--\$16 a month for the two of us, but considering the difference and that it is more centrally located I'm sure its worth the difference. After being over to dinner today and seeing the deserted room we

moved out of I'm sure I don't know how we stood the conditions this long.

Armory Completed

Yesterday afternoon we went to the band concert and promenade over in the new armory. They now have it completed and ready for drill.

A band concert was given yesterday in order to give the students, faculty, and others interested in the university a chance to see the immense size of the building. To demonstrate this (two) of the football team punted the football both for height and for distance but were unable to hit the roof of the structure.

A few track events were run off, and the afternoon completed by a soccer game, the first of its kind (in the country) to be played indoors."

1/11/1915

Settled

"Well we are nicely settled now and I tell you I enjoy the place. Its rather damp and dreary outside but here the radiator is chugging a little and is heating up the room much more evenly than the hot air ever could do and at the same time doesn't give us a lot of dust and dirt floating around in the room. (*Like the hot air did in the old apartment*)"

1/13/1915

Invite to Dinner (*See also 1/31*)

"Went over to see my faculty adviser the other day in regard to next semester's course and received an invitation to dine with himself, wife, and a few of his protégés next Sunday evening. Have accepted the invitation so think I'll fast all day Sunday in preparation for it."

1/17/1915

Fraternity Seed Planted

"I received the paper and the helpful hints (*about a fraternity*). Thank ever so much. I'm sure I need the latter pretty badly for there is quite a bit of difference between eating at the club and rounding off the corners at a real dinner. That's one way in which

a fraternity has the advantage, for there the freshmen are pretty well trained in table etiquette and other social courtesies.”

1/12/1915

Registration

“We finished registering Monday morning after passing thru much red tape and many crowds of students, who were jammed together so tightly that they would make a bargain counter rush seem like an old maid’s tea part in comparison.”

1/25/1915

Activities

“This afternoon we are going over to the Auditorium to hear that new pipe organ and to see an art exhibit...Next Wednesday night the Ben Greet Players are gong to present Twelfth Night in the auditorium and I want to take it in if possible.

Well folks I’ve finally learned to swim the length of that tank 75 ft. and accomplished the wonderful feat last Saturday after much splashing, spluttering and swallowing water. Am also doing a little work up in the gym in order to get an appetite for meals and feel lots better for it.”

1/31/15

Faculty Dinner Invite

“You wanted me to tell you about that dinner out. I had a fine time. Dr Hayes is head of the Sociology department here and is a pretty wise old man. He has three sons, one the oldest is a freshman in the University, and the other two go to the grade schools.

He invited six of us fellows over and we all sat around the fireplace and told stories and listened to interesting experiences related by Dr Hayes himself and passed a very pleasant evening.

Mrs. Hayes served a nice lap luncheon to us of fried oysters or scallops (I don’t know which) in oatmeal, sandwiches, celery, pickles, coffee and cake, real home made cake too. I enjoyed the evening immensely because the whole family was so interesting.

Have an invitation to go see them again, whenever I wish and intend to make use of for that is the class of people it pays one to associate with."

2/5/1915

Grades

"Have been around to all my instructors and found out how I was reported and will tell you those I have received so far. Chemistry 86, Rhetoric 87, German 92, Trig 98. Don't know what my Economics grade is yet but think it will somewhere between 85-90. My average for the semester will be 89-90."

2/15/1915

New Semester Challenges

"It certainly feels fine to be back at work again. Am taking some stiffer subjects than last semester and they are going to make me work some. Rhetoric is my "Jonah" this semester.

My German too promises to work me a lot harder as my teacher is a hustling foreigner and is quite a contrast to the slow going old professor I had last semester.

Astronomy is unfolding itself and a lot of mysteries to us. Tonight we go out to the observatory and peek at the stars if the sky is not cloudy.

Obtained special permission to enter a class in modern European history and trace each country's history from 1550 to the present modern war in Europe. The course requires 1600 pages of reading during the semester or from 80 to 100 pages per week."

2/22/1915

Church

"Yesterday I spent very religiously for the first Sunday since I've been here...I went to Sunday School and church with Randall, a Freshman Ag student from Aurora and Curtis of Marengo. (*In the afternoon*) I went to the regular Sunday afternoon organ recital

and wound up the day by walking down to the Presbyterian Church in Urbana for the evening service. (*Note: Randall later invited Dad to AXP*)”

2/28/1915

Grades

“We are living (in a rooming house) with quite a studious bunch of fellows as the results signify. Four of us fellows ranked above 90 as an average, and Jackman, a Junior from Elgin has been pledged to the Tau Beta, the honorary Engineering Fraternity.”

3/21/1915

Military Review

“Gov Dunne & Adjutant General Dickson (*no relation*) were here for their annual review of the cadet corps last week, and since then things have begun to happen. We now have drill twice a week, Monday and Wednesday afternoons, to get ready for spring so you see we are some soldiers.

Fires

The last Tuesday Lewis and Co’s large new department store in Champaign burned to the ground threatening to wipe out the whole business district of Champaign. The fire started early in the morning and so after breakfast I went down to see it. The fire was at its height. Smoke was rolling up in clouds from two large buildings covering a good share of their respective blocks and it looked as though several more building would have to go.

Telephone calls were sent to Danville and Decatur both of which towns sent over the automobile fire trucks, but with the assistance of the Urbana department the fire was controlled and confined to the two buildings as the water supply held out first rate.

Friday night we had a fire scare all our own, here. Dewey Dolan a fellow from Amboy and I were visiting right after supper when one of the girls from downstairs knocked on the door and asked in a quiet matter of fact way if one of us boys wouldn’t come downstairs as they thought there was a fire in the basement. We all three went down but could get no further than the kitchen as

the smoke was so stingy that we couldn't see it hurt our eyes so much.

Dolan then went outside and broke in basement window from which the fire came pouring and shooting out. Well we got pots and pans of water and dumped it on the flames until they were subdued and then went down into the basement and threw out an old barrel of half burned rubbish which was still smoldering. I guess the kid who takes care of the furnace was a little careless about leaving the paper strewn around and stray coal must have set it afire."

3/30/15

Another Fire

"Last night while we were at the Astronomy class in the Observatory a house caught fire in Urbana, about two blocks away. Both Champaign and Urbana fire departments were called but failed to do any thing for quite a while but finally did get the fire under control. Several professors had apartments in the building and a lot nice furniture was totally ruined."

4/11/1915

Prohibition

"It also seemed good to hear that Hampshire did finally go dry instead of being influenced by Elgin as Dundee was. Hurrah for the women! Went to Sunday School and Church this morning and heard an Anti-Saloon League man give a pretty good speech on Prohibition. He prophesies that within the next five years the whole U.S. will be dry."

4/15/1915

Comments on Fraternities

"Al (roommate) had quite a time over in Peoria, hob-knobbing with all the aristocrats and elite of the place. In fact, he hasn't ceased since his return, since he has accepted a couple of invitations out to dinner at different fraternity houses.

Last night he was over to the Zeta Psi house...and had a dandy time. I guess he rather enjoys the life too, although he doesn't say much. Tomorrow night he is going out again and I shouldn't be surprised if he made a fraternity. I certainly hope he does, for I think that is worth as much as the book education we get down here."

4/29/1915

"(My roommate Al went to Peoria) and met with fraternity men even from Harvard and Wisconsin. In this way I suppose he received his invitation to the "Beta" house two weeks ago...

As for me, you know that finances would not permit my hitting the pace required, and it is not hard now to see why he received his invitation last Sunday.

Nonetheless "keeping everlastingly at it" brings success, so if I keep trying hard enough; perhaps someday I'll be able to amount to something too—even to owning a Saxon (*fancy automobile*)."

5/16/1915

Picnic

"Calkins came in right after I had got back from dinner and reminded me of a picnic excursion that I had promised him to go on. It was out to Homer Park a cozy little place situated on the bluffs (small ones) a little ways east of Champaign.

Heine, Kamp, Chas. and five girls and two fellows and myself made up the crowd, so you see we had quite a lark. We carried our lunch out and ate in picnic fashion, sitting on the trunks of some old fallen down trees, then went for a boat ride and came back home.

It was my first date with a girl since I had been down here and I felt out of practice almost, but managed to have a splendid time as everyone was jolly and happy."

5/24/1915

Conference Championships (3)

“Well Illinois clinched another championship yesterday when she won from Chicago 4 to 1 in baseball. This makes 3 championships in major sports for us and is some record. However Chi took revenge on us in track 74 to 51, which is some loss for Illinois as we have had the champion track squad here for some years. Anyway 3 championships in one year are enough for any school, and more than most of them can do.”

5/30/1915

Rain/Cadet Corps

“It had rained here since last Wednesday; consequently our sham battle did not take place yesterday as it was supposed to. Instead all the cadets, battery corps & signal corps a mounted troop of I.N.G. & a company of infantry, 2300 strong marched down thru Urbana and then back to Champaign, around thru the residence section and thence home.

The parade was indeed a pretty spectacle and we had a bunch of spectators. Tomorrow afternoon we have our final drill and the Commandant reviews us for the last time this year in the regular Decoration Day Exercises.”

6/7/1915

Credits & Grade

“Have taken three final examinations already and will take my last one, the one in German next Tuesday morning, getting out just in time to take that afternoon train out of here.

I think that I've passed my required number of hours all right, but as for getting that average of 90 on my 19 hours of work guess that is out of the question...See you Tuesday night.”

Sophomore—Fall, 1915 to June, 1916

9/17/1915

Arrival

“Arrived in town all OK last night after re-checking trunk twice and nearly missing train. We stayed all night at the Y as I planned and spent today looking for work and a room.

Of the former there is none left and of the latter there are but few good ones. At the employment office they have a waiting list of 300 while what rooms are left were renting \$16-\$18 for two. Gosh,

one fellow said, "I didn't expect to rent a house when I came here."

9/20/1915

Found a Room

"We are now nicely at (512 E Daniel St) where we have a southern room on the first floor, very nicely furnished and within a block and a half of the main buildings of the university.

For this scrumptious abode Dolan and I have to pay \$16 every month, but we could not find anything to suit us better. The people living here are nice, quiet folks and as there are only four other students besides us in the house, I guess we will have a good comfortable and quiet place in which to study."

9/27/1915

W.C.T.U.

"Oh yes, I almost forgot to tell you that Frank Randall's mother was in Hampshire from Aurora to attend the W.C.T.U. meeting but failed to see you, although Frank said she inquired for Mrs. Dickson as both had sons down at the University. I wish that you could have met her for she must be fully as nice as her son, and he is a dandy little fellow."

10/3/1915

Church

"Well to begin with, I've been to church once today, but it wasn't the Methodist this time. A boy from Marengo and I were going together this morning but it took us so long to get fixed up, we decided to go to the McKinley Memorial Presbyterian Church just a block from here. Well the sermon was fine and, as the little boy said when he went to the party and saw the bountiful refreshment spread before him, "I'm glad I went".

The (*young*) minister has the knack of giving a new meaning to the old words, and of making a person feel as though he was here for some real good after all.

They say that change of pastures makes fat calves. Well this is true in my case, both literally and figuratively. Literally because my breadbasket has expanded about two pounds worth since I've been here and figuratively because everything seems to take on a new meaning. In the sermon this morning the pastor argued for a better study of the Bible, gave his reasons (which were pretty sound) and gave us a new idea of the way in which it should be studied and for the end in view.

Frank Randall

I cut my letter off here last night as Frank Randall from Aurora and (a fellow named South) came around for a little chat before going to supper, after which we went over to the league services at 6:15 at Trinity Methodist Church, thence to McKinley for the evening service. South and I have fallen in love with that church even more than with Trinity and he has even obtained a job singing in the choir there.

Frank Randall is talking about enrolling in the Music school for the purpose of continuing his piano lessons here in addition to his regular agriculture course.

“Date”

Saturday night I got a date with a little sophomore girl from Polo Illinois and we took in a moving picture show at Urbana. She’s the second university girl I have taken anywhere during my brief college career. So you can see how well I’ve attended to the social side of life down here. However, it’s going to get a little more attention this year, than last for I don’t quite want to be a hermit.

Football

Saturday afternoon Illinois played the Haskell Indians (non-conference). They proved to be easy for us and Zuppke tried out a bunch of his varsity candidates upon them, while we were winning 36 to 0. Bart Macomber covered himself with glory by making a touchdown, three or four place kicks, and one 43-yard drop kick over the goal posts, a feat which hasn’t been accomplished on Illinois field since 1910 when Ott Seiller made his famous drop kick and won the Chicago game 3 to 0.”

10/10/1915

Got a Job

“To begin with the long expected has happened, I have got a job—K.M. (kitchen mechanic). This is a most excellent way of obtaining meals for nothing except a little polishing of the table after each meal for an hour or so. I applied for the job when I first came down but everything was taken. However the woman took my name and address in case anything should turn up and it is a mighty good thing she did too, for one of the fellows proved to be too fat and slow just about the time my bank roll was getting depleted.

Consequently when she called me up Wednesday I went over and have been wiping dishes ever since, three times a day. There are three of us handling the dishes for sixty people but we are pretty good hustlers and make things hum some, I tell you.

Chi Delta

Do you remember Frank Randall, the boy from Aurora of whom I talked about so much and to whom I wrote during the summer? Well, he is pledged to the Chi Delta fraternity. He was over to see me last night and we talked things over quite a bit.

Guess that he has got in with a pretty nice bunch of fellows (XD) and mainly because he is a real musician, he sure can “tinkle the ivories” some. I congratulated him upon his good luck (or rather fortune, because he deserves to be pledged and it really isn’t luck) and he seemed as tickled over it as a kid could be. One good thing about him, he won’t get the “big head” because he is too sensible a little chap for that.

Good marks

Oh yes, I told you in last week’s letter that I had made some pretty good recitations the Friday before, didn’t I? Well, this last Friday I got my mark in History I and it was 93. Not so bad as a starter eh! I only hope that I can keep that one away up because I have a head start in that and ought to coin some marks to help average up some other poor ones.

Public Speaking for example is going to pull my average down some but it is going to be good for me—something like castor oil. The doctor says take it even though you don’t like the taste of it. It’s good medicine.”

11/14/1915

Randall’s Initiation

“Frank Randall came after me to go to church this morning, so we went over to Trinity M.E. & heard a Dr. Draper, missionary from Japan give rather an interesting talk upon the conditions affecting church work in that heathen country.

They initiated Frank Friday night, and gave him the formal ceremony last evening, so that now he is a full-fledged fraternity “man” (he isn’t as tall as Dolan and is very slight build) so you can imagine why I underlined “man.”

I can detect quite a change for the better in the kid since he joined them the first of the semester. He seems to have broadened out and developed quite a lot, even in that short time.”

12/8/1915

Chi Delta Dinner Invite

"I have an invitation from Frank Randall for dinner for next Tuesday evening at his fraternity but turned it down because Wednesday is a big day and I need to study. He certainly is a dandy little fellow and hasn't seemed to change his feelings towards me even though he did "make" a fraternity."

12/12/1915

Quit Job

"I've "jumped" my job. This is my theme for this evening sermon.

Firstly, I quit the wonderfully remuneration position I held because the job was taking more than the amount of time that I had calculated to give it. It took 30 minutes each way to get there.

Secondly, the reason I quit was augmented by that the best of our crew of champion dishwashers is leaving tomorrow morning. That meant that either I would have to do the dish "daubing" myself or put in still more time helping to educate a perfectly new man into the intricacies of dish daubing.

Thirdly and lastly, I have an extra \$5 that will just pay my board from now on until Christmas so I am going to start in tomorrow morning to use it. I might add that my logic exam netted me an 84 so you see that it is time for me to pep up if I want to bring my average up where you want it.

Christmas Guests

I would like to ask a couple of boys to come out to Hampshire the latter part of Xmas vacation if you are going to be home. They are plain ordinary boys that are accustomed to seeing a little dirt etc. so there is to be absolutely no "fusing" if I do get them to come.

One of the boys Dieserud is from Washington D.C. He is the one of whom I spoke when I was home Thanksgiving as having the highest average in the University last semester 96.6. He is an engineering student and we ate at the Buby Club until I got my (*dishwashing job*). I'd like to have Frank Randall up from Aurora

to play a few selections on our piano for you. He is a great little musician.”

1/16/1916 (*Moved to 1206 N Springfield, Urbana*)

Dieserud's Absence

“About Dieserud's not coming out to Hampshire, I can't say for certain because I didn't have much time for talking with him the other day, but I rather inferred that he was having too good a time in Chicago with his friends and that he probably didn't even have time enough to write a post card of regrets.

Well I should worry; if that is the way he feels or felt about it. I probably can get along all right without his company. Anyway I'm glad that he didn't come because he would have found us in a sort of muddle as it turned out. (*Flu bug*)”

1/20/1916

2nd Invite to Dinner at XD

“Received an invitation over to Randall's fraternity to dinner tomorrow evening. He has asked me to come over several times before but I always evaded answering—bashfulness if you want to call it such.

But anyway I'm going to endeavor to cover up as much of it as possible and see what kind of a bunch of fellows he is in with. Have already met some of them and they seem to be fine fellows, but--new broom sweeps clean. I'll write you later as to the detailed report of the evening's frivolity.”

(*Note: No letters describe moving to XD fraternity*)

2/13/1916

Eight Chi Delts

“I went to church this morning with the Chi Delta aggregation. Eight of us walked over to the First M.E. Church in Champaign and heard a fine sermon. In fact I believe it was the best service that I've been to in Champaign for the minister had chosen an interesting and pertinent topic and delivered it in a mighty interesting manner by citing examples that are found in every day walks of life.

Fritz Kreisler

I went over to hear Fritz Kreisler, the world famed violinist, who gave a recital in the auditorium. It's hard to describe Kreisler's playing because it requires knowledge of musical technical terms that I'm mightily deficient in. However I can tell you of the effect that he and his playing had upon me.

When he made his first appearance upon the stage and was greeted with rounds of applause to the time when he bowed himself off, but was encored back at the finale his influence over the audience seemed magnetic and the way in which he made that violin of his talk was wonderful.

Throughout the whole recital he spoke not a word nor cracked a smile—the latter because his wife is lying near death's door in New York, while he is filling engagements here and in Chicago and Milwaukee—but went after every composition with a determination, so it seemed, to make us feel with him, and so we did.”

2/18/1916

“Dreadful” Initiation

“Say folks, what's wrong, do you want me to give up the fraternity? It sounded very much that way in your letter. Well if you do now is the time, for that “dreadful” initiation that you tell about will come off about the second week in March. After I'll be either with them or against them, that's still up to them, and me for I am only on probation.

I received the Elgin News with the news of the Baker boy's death (*initiation at a different college*) and was glad to get it in order to see the way in which it stretched the facts.

You know that I had a course in Logic last semester, didn't you? Well I learned at least one thing from that course and that was to be critical and look for the other side of the case. Now we all have to admit that the scrap was a pretty rough affair, so much so in fact, that it has been abolished, but according to information received by Dean Babcock there were other facts to be taken into consideration in regards to that death.

Fraternity Life

Well it seems as though I've lived here about all my life, and I'm getting very much accustomed to it (*fraternity life*). Sunday afternoon Chi Delta has an invitation to an Open House over on Chalmers St. so I guess little Dick (*nickname*) will make his debut as a Beau Brummell for them."

2/15/1916

Military Ball

"This evening I have been having a great time helping several of the boys get fixed up for the Military Ball, one of the biggest social functions of the school year. Gov. Deneen and adj. Gen. Dickson are in attendance. Six or eight fellows from the house were among them. (*Freshmen and Sophomore*) cadets could wear their uniforms but the non-militarists had to wear dress suits.

This was my first chance at getting a close view of such a garment and I sure made good use of the opportunity. The only thing I wish is that I was going too. (*See next letter for why he didn't go*)

I'll get my share of that life in later days. Our fraternity "formal" is held sometime in April and then little Dick will get his opportunity to feel the "coat tails" flop. Can you imagine me in an outfit like that?"

3/1/1916

"Sunday the boys who went to the Military Ball brought their girls over here for a little banquet and we had a great, bountiful, sumptuous, delightful, delectable dinner. You asked why I didn't go? Reason, tickets \$5.00 apiece besides other expenses for cab, etc.

Frank (Randall) rather got his foot into it by going I think, for his girl reciprocated by asking him over to her formal a week from Friday night. Those two and our own in April will be rather hard on his pocket book, I'm thinking, and I guess he does too now that he has been thinking it over, but he did want to go."

3/5/1916

Sorority Exchange

"This afternoon about 10 of us went over to the Sigma Kappa sorority's "open house". We met quite a number of the fair damsels, were well entertained and treated to Nabisco's and Pineapple ice after which we resigned our places to others who were there for the same purpose as ourselves.

Initiation

Last night finished up our initiation, which came rather sooner than I expected, and now I'm sporting a regular fraternity pin. What do you know about that? Well our initiation didn't anywhere's near come up to prophecies, and I was a little disappointed, for they were real human to us Friday night when the informal (or paddling) took place. And last night of course there could be no rough work for the ritual work was given then.

Consequently you can see that the tendency to abolish this rough horse-play really is being supplemented by less trying performances. In fact I think we candidates enjoyed the fun about as well as the members. One of the stunts we had to do Friday evening was to eat dinner blindfolded, and it was rather confusing to have to feel around the plate for our knives and forks and then to practically feel the food and pilot it to our mouths."

3/14/1916

Dance

"No I do not know whether that lady was any relation of Miss Mann down here nor did I ask her about her ancestry when I took her to the dance Saturday night for I had something else to think and talk about.

It was mostly think what to talk about with me, because it has been so long since I have been out with a girl that I was pretty rusty on social topics. However it's up to me to improve, for that's what I'm here for.

Grades—House Average and Mine

Here is my official grad card from the Registrar. Please put it with the others, wherever they are. Our house averaged eighth in the

list of the fraternities down here for last semester. Pretty good don't you think?"

3/19/1916

Formal Dance

"Just at present all the air is permeated with talk of the "doings" next month when we have our formal and everyone appears in his long black coat tails and white shirt bosom.

However I have just about decided not to go this year for I can't see the fun of the extra expense of dress suit rental and buying of a new vest, shirt, collars, the gloves, etc. to my already long list of expenses.

Next year when I've made my fortune selling books I'll be able to buy me a new dress suit and all the togs to match. Then, too, I'll be old enough to know how to behave myself perhaps."

3/26/1916

Formal Costs

"You asked what our "formal dues" were and if they were for everyone. Well the formal is the chief social event of the fraternity during the year, as it is the occasion when everyone dons his stiff bosom, white collar and tie, pumps and full dress, and then proceeds to hobnob as an aristocratic son of the rich, whether he is or not.

The "formal dues" is the term applied to that monetary contribution that is essential to pay for said aristocratic pleasure, and covers such expenses as hall, orchestra hire, banquet and cab. It generally amounts to about \$6 and is assessed upon all members alike, whether they attend or not. Besides this assessment I would have to invest \$10 to \$15 more to pay for dress suit rental and buy shirt, collars, white vest and pumps. However I am no millionaire and since I am spending enough money by joining the fraternity I think that I had better forego this pleasure this year.

National AXP

Last night and today noon at dinner we entertained a representative of Alpha Chi Rho, the national fraternity of which I

wrote you some time ago, and it certainly was an education to talk to him. By the way we received a compliment that we consider to be pretty high considering the source. He told us that we really talked something sensible instead of the usual jabber about girls, etc. that he was in the habit of receiving from prospective fraternities throughout the country.

Well I'll admit that we did discourse about almost every topic under the sun, and some which weren't, but the beauty of it was we were able to do it. He himself is no back number because in the ten years since he left college he has travelled the eastern and central part of the U.S. pretty extensively, and was making a tour of the continent of Europe when the war broke out.

However the best part about him was that he was a good "mixer" and could converse intelligently upon every topic brought up. I considered it an education to listen to him. I know I say the same thing about every man whom we have over to the house, but I am sure that I am going to benefit by fraternity life in that way alone even if in no other. It's a mighty good thing to meet and listen to different types of people like that, to imitate their good qualities perhaps, but more especially to compare yourself with them and endeavor to analyze yourself and to see where you stand."

4/2/1916

National AXP

"I am going to start this letter this afternoon because I am feeling rather jubilant and may lose the feeling before the time for my regular weekly letter tomorrow. We have been having some company here the past week that's been putting a different kind of feeling into us.

You know that I have mentioned the fact that we were expecting to "go Alpha Chi Rho", that is to have our little local fraternity united with a strong and rather exclusive eastern fraternity. The boys have been working for this for the past three years, petitioning the National Council and sending representatives east to the National Convention until finally they have obtained recognition. We are complimenting ourselves with the fact that we will stand some show at last. The convention passed an

amendment last month pertaining to westward expansion and now it is being referred to each individual chapter for their approval.

Dance Chaperones

Today we entertained the chaperones for the formal banquet and dance Friday night followed by music. Dean and Mrs. Clark, Prof and Mrs. Jamison of the Ag School and Dr and Mrs. Harris (Dr Harris is an Alpha Chi Rho and is an English instructor.) Col. and Mrs. Trevett were coming but unexpected company came and they couldn't get over. They are millionaires I guess but are common people even though he is a bank president in Champaign. So you see the little Chi Delta isn't such a back number when it comes to picking chaperones for the dance.

One thing that is bothering us is that Col. Trevett is liable not to be able to come to the formal (*next Friday*) but the Mrs. will. Consequently someone will have to be her escort. Now it looks very much as though this someone is going to be me. I've said about not going. However the more I think it over, the more I think I was foolish for deciding not to go in the first place for I ought to get in on a function as important as this one. I think I can borrow a few of the incidentals that go with the dress suit. If I can I'll be OK, for my formal assessment will be due anyway and the dress suit rental and shirt won't be very much."

4/5/1916

Misunderstanding

"It seems as though I have the happy faculty of blundering up my letters so that you are not able to come to the right conclusion as to what I really do mean when I write for from the letter which I received this morning from you I inferred that you thought I must be on the quick road to the bad place because of taking another man's wife to the formal. But what was the reason that you didn't stop to think that perhaps I couldn't have sense enough to keep out of the sure scandal that would be caused if I took a young married woman to the formal?

The only reason under the sun that I was persuaded to think of the fact at all was that the Trevetts are greatly looked up to around

here for their money and social prestige. Thus it was that the Chi Delta fraternity feels highly honored to include their names upon the list of chaperones. Col. Trevett is getting along in years and he is getting deaf and cannot enjoy social functions. All the upper classmen in the house had already made "dates" for the formal and so they came to me and asked if I wouldn't be her escort. They told me all about what a nice lady she was, not snobbish or stuck up and she was so good as an entertainer they didn't want to lose out on having her come as our chaperone.

Well I couldn't see anything wrong with going with a lady of that sort, especially as she is old enough to be my mother, having two boys graduate from the university here and I don't know how many girls. However since writing one of the seniors has received a regret at the last moment that his girl friend can't attend and unless he gets another one he will undoubtedly take Mrs. Trevett."

4/9/1916

Formal Over

"Well the formal is over at last and today the boys are busy entertaining their lady loves at dinner in order to pay off their party calls. Everyone seems to be mighty well pleased with the good time they had at the formal and since they danced until nearly morning I should think that they would be satisfied. Well I took your advice and watched the performance from the recess of the kitchen, thereby I am a little better off, at least financially, than those who attended in full dress suit."

5/14/1916

Parent's Weekend

"As the old saw goes, "Nobody loves me and my hands are cold". Such is my feeling just at the present moment. I had rather been at least expecting a letter from you folks and from Floyd but the weekend rolled around without any mail for me, and when the festivities were over-run with other parents I began to think that I was really left out in the cold. All of our fellows sent their folks home today, after they had perjured themselves into admitting that they had enjoyed the best time of their lives, consequently we are all together again tonight.

AXP Acceptance

What I have to write is very important and has caused us to feel about as elated as anyone could feel. It has to deal without "Nationalization". You remember when I first joined this fraternity, Floyd (*brother*) objected some because it was a mere local affair and not a national fraternity. I really believe that it is mostly for the people of the local chapter that you join a fraternity, nevertheless some consideration is certainly due to the wonderful bond that exist between brothers in a national organization.

For more than a year the boys here have been petitioning to be installed as a chapter of the Alpha Chi Rho, which is a strong eastern fraternity. Our local is to be the first chapter installed west of the Allegheny Mts. since the establishment of the fraternity. Well the boys petitioned along in the fall and sent a representative east to plead our cause and in many other ways worked with a spirit that is almost beyond comprehension until last Friday night when we received word that our petition had been granted and that representatives would be sent west to install us into Alpha Chi Rho as "Phi kappa" Chapter. These will come before finals, probably about Saturday May 27th. Hurrah!

It is hard to express to you by this meager means how great is our spirit of exuberance over the occasion, so I will not attempt it anymore, but believe me we sure are glad."

5/18/1916

Installation Date

"I tried my best to obtain a couple of Illini (papers) to send to you so that you could see the notice of our going National. Anyhow the auspicious event it going to occur soon, and we expect to be hosts to the installing officers around Decoration Day.

ROTC

I wonder if you read a notice in the Chicago paper concerning a parade to be given in Chicago, sometime near Memorial Day, and which was to be participated in by our whole brigade—2300 men?"

5/21/1916

Misc.

"Our initiation into Alpha Chi Rho will be held May 30 when all the head officers come from the east for the occasion. From that time on Chi Delta will cease to exist and we will take over our new name of Alpha Chi Rho. All of the alumni of Chi Delta are expected back for the occasion and everyone will be out in their best "bid and tucker" in honor of our guests.

Another of the AXP boys went to Wisconsin Saturday as one of the runners in the mile run. That is one thing a fraternity does for a person that really is good for it gets him out into some activity besides his routine work in school, so that he can meet folks and make a start towards a circle of friends that will aid him after he gets out of school.

Under separate cover I am sending you a picture of the boys here in the house. I'll try to name them so that you will have an idea who I am talking about when I write or speak of them.

6/1/1916

Misc.

"Have you folks decided to make the trip to Chicago Saturday to see the parade? We will spend nearly the whole day making the trip so I don't imagine it is going to be much fun for me.

Right now I am also exercised a little over straightening up my account down here . I find that I am woefully short on cash and will need a good portion of the \$25 to get cleaned up started for home. I really didn't think I would need but a little more than what I brought back Easter but our Nationalization Expenses counted up quite a little.

However now we are full fledged Alpha Chi Rho's, the official institution having taken place last Tuesday, and we feel pretty good now that we can be called a National Organization."



The Chi Delta house on 104 E John St, Champaign became Phi Kappa of AXP;

SUMMER JOB

Editor's Note: Dad spent the summer of 1916 selling books door to door in the Muncie, IN area for 8 weeks. He went in with high hopes of making a significant amount of money. He missed the quota needed for a bonus and barely made living expenses.

Nonetheless he diligently stuck with it and felt the experience was valuable. All four of Dad's children had no option but to work at least one summer in a sales job.

*Dad greatly enjoyed being an Alpha Chi Rho. He returned to the house in the fall of 1916. He found a **home away from home.***

Junior Year

Sept. 1916 to April 1917

9/17/1916

"Yesterday I attended the registration class and registered early so that tomorrow I'll be ready for work for the Registrar . . . Oh yes, I was also lucky enough to land a job in Military. I went over to the Military office yesterday afternoon and saw my name posted as 2nd Lt of Company H of the 2nd Regiment so I feel pretty good even though I did miss out on the summer camp."

AXP Grades—Well folks that wasn't a day dream after all about our Fraternity average being second. It 's as true as could be and we only came .6 of 1% from tying the leaders so watch our smoke next semester...with the addition of a few more of the Clark type of students we will have a regular Tau Beta Pi assembly here. The seniors who graduated last June were not the most remarkable students...

Well today I received good news folks. You know I wrote you about receiving my ROTC 2nd Lieut commission. Well I have been promoted to 1st Lieut and took up my duties this evening.

All I have to do is carry a sword, look wise and be sure that I am on the right side before I act. I have a real pretty sabre and expect to make some classy soldier when I get my new uniform. It will be olive drab in color and will resemble the regular military uniform.

Studies

I am going to pitch in and work this year so that I may stand a chance to be elected to Phi Beta Kappa the honorary Liberal Arts & Science Fraternity. However you needn't publish the latter for I may be a trifle presumptuous and suffer a fall."

10/1/1916

Military

"Military drill this week proved to be even more than I expected to bump into. To tell you the truth as I looked over that gang of Freshies and walked out in front of them to endeavor to instill the rudiments of military science into them, I wouldn't have given very

much for the prospects of this company winning the company competitive.

However they seemed to be a pretty willing bunch and I have hopes that we may instill some military into them after all. The chances are pretty thin though.

Public Speaking

Military isn't the only thing that I am taking this semester but it is going to aid in developing the same side as my course in Public Speaking. The instructor promises us some actual debating later on before some real audiences, for he is going to take us on side trips to Monticello and other little towns around here whenever and wherever we can get our expenses paid for going before them and discussing any side or both sides of any question under the sun the town wishes to hear debated. The real purpose of the course is instilling into us the first principles of clear and logical thinking and expressing of thoughts.

I received the (report) cards and can't say that I think very much of my chances for Phi Beta Kappa now. My average is only about 88 up to date so it means a tall job of scrambling get it up to 90."

10/8/1916

Home to Farm?

"You asked whether I would be willing to come home and help do the work. In answer I'll say this, that although I would like very much to finish school first, still I'm very much of the opinion that our farm is going to the dogs pretty rapidly, and consequently if you take it over from the tenant, I won't be one to stand back and look on. I think you know my sentiments pretty well yourself for I remember of telling you once that I would rather like to learn the hard points of farming if I had some one to tell me what to do.

Public Speaking

You remember I'm taking Public Speaking. Well our instructor kindly mentioned to us the other day that he was in the habit of giving a 90 at least to anyone who was interested in trying out for the Debating Team to represent Illinois in the regular Fall Debates to be held in December.

However seeing that there are about 10 varsity debaters trying out for places this year, the chances are pretty poor for me as one of the rabble of 100 others. Nevertheless because of this purely mercenary motive, I'm gong to go after that 90. I've been reading all the material I possibly have time to. When I finally get my head packed full, I'm going to organize my material and see how much of a darned fool I really am.

Literary Society

Last night I went over to a meeting of one of the literary societies here. The society rather appeals to me as being one of the most practical things to identify oneself with. It rather does take nerve to get up before the bunch and talk sense.

I got an opportunity to venture my opinion upon the subject "Resolve, that the Federal Government should own and operate the railroads". I got my words all twisted up and coming out crooked, but I had the satisfaction of feeling more at ease when I got thru. I got the principles all right but because of the large class I didn't get much chance at the practice.

Topics of Conversation

I am assistant host to day for our patrons, or chaperones; it is customary to invite the patrons over to dinner in order to get acquainted before the (*formal dance.*) We have some folks pretty well up in University Circles on our list so it sure keeps one on his mettle to find topics of conversation.

It takes tact and brain work to establish a common footing with the other party and then go on to talk about topics that are outside the realm of common ordinary topics, school life and other chaff or gossip that one gets in the habit of wasting time with."

10/22/1916

Schedule

"Whew, but don't the weeks sail by in a hurry. This is the fifth week of school and seems more like the second as far as length of time is concerned. About all there is to do is to get up in the morning eat three meals, attend classes, study and go to bed. The

same thing the next day. The only consolation is the work is so interesting that time flies in a hurry, that one really doesn't realize the amount of work he is doing.

I forgot to mail you my (schedule) last week. It sure is a neat little affair, even though it only shows you my hours for recitation. When you figure that one should average about 2 hours to study for each hour of credit you can easily see we put in quite a little amount of time.

Informal Dance

This last Sat. night I enjoyed a very pleasant change...It was the occasion of Alpha Chi Rho's first informal dance of the season and we sure had a dandy time. It was held at the Champaign Country Club and was attended by about twenty-five of the active members and their friends, besides the usual number of chaperones.

I took a Miss from Decatur, a Kappa Kappa Gamma and am entertaining some pleasant memories of the occasion. Randall had a girl from Aurora while Art Sanderson had his fiancé from Illinois College. Well I could go on about each one. Suffice it to say that we had a dandy time and the pledges (in whose honor the dance was held) feel pretty good over the affair.

P.S.

I sent my washing home so you will probably have received it before this. And most important of all, I forgot about the money question. I had paid up to the 15th of Oct and was planning to let things run until I went home Nov. 4 to settle up but if you can send along a little extra, it will be thankfully received."

10/24/1916

Misc.

"Your letter enclosing check was thankfully received this morning.

Do you remember the little freshman by the name of Bodenschatz over at 512 Daniel last year? He was initiated the same time as I, and is now living here.

He was working over in the Mechanical engineering shop yesterday when a piece of steel about an inch long struck him just

below his right eye and nearly put it out. Happily it missed the eyeball but was imbedded so deeply that the doctor could not get it out with forceps.

They were obliged to take him over to the Physics Lab. and use an electro-magnet to pull out the piece. He was nervous and upset...until we got around him and laughed his mind off upon other subjects until he fell asleep. Today he stayed away from all classes but is able to go around with that one eye all bandaged

Poor kid, he got overheated this summer and had the right half of his face paralyzed as a result; has not recovered fully from that and now has the left eye done up.”

11/12/1916

U.S. Election/Inflation

“Say now but it certainly was too bad about that election. I never thought there were so darned many Democrats in the country and there won't be four years hence when the war stops and we have a touch of their administration under un-inflated conditions.

Speaking of inflated conditions reminds me of an article I read yesterday for Public Speaking. The author claimed that owing to the dumping of securities and gold in the U.S. by European countries the amount of gold per capita has increased from \$8.40 twenty years ago to \$24.80 at present...causing an increase in living expenses of at least 30%.

Well Folks this started me to thinking and combined with my experience so far this there are two conclusions to be drawn:

1. That this extravagant son is liable to spend more money this year than last by a goodly sum, or else be obliged to quit school.
2. That the value of a dollar in money is depreciating so put your money into something that will increase in value.

Hard times for those (on fixed income). Good for the producer of things.

Well here are the cold and cruel facts. After (paying my expenses) I'm still going to need about \$21 to settle up to Dec. 1 necessary expenses.”

11/17/1916

Expenses

"And about that question you raised Pa. I don't believe that I have been spending money very foolishly down here. I have tried to be as economical in buying books, etc as possible...Folks, things have gone up, no matter what you say....I know that total price is going to be a whole lot more this year than ever before, but how much more I am rather dubious. I'll send you an itemized account if you wish but I don't see how that will cut down expenses any.

Sometime I think it would be almost better for me to drop out at the end of this semester...especially you will need some help on the place, stay out a year until money gets more free or prices go down. What do you think of that plan?"

11/21/1916

Homecoming

"The Homecoming festivities were great folks and I wish you could have been here. (*Describes Sr/Soph football game; Hobo Band; Hi School kite prize; cross country run—"one of our men won first place, 5 miles in 27 min. 36 seconds".*)

Saturday afternoon we fought Chicago (in football) but they trimmed us 20 to 7. It really should have been 7 to 7 but what is the use of trying to establish any alibis when it won't accomplish anything? (*see 11/26 ltr*)

Saturday evening we held a "smoker" here at the house in order to get the old "grads" acquainted with they younger men of the Fraternity. As a "smoker" it was a dismal failure for only a few use the pesky weed; however we all enjoyed the cider and cookies that went along but more especially the social time of meeting the older boys and conversing about old times. It was in truth a regular Homecoming.

11/26/1916

Church

“I have just returned from church—Free Methodist Meetings over in Urbana and feel decidedly sacrilegious, so if I shock you in this you will know the cause. (*We attended*) a series of revivals which the Free Methodists are giving.

Well I have been in the Union Stock Yards in Chicago and found just such a medley of noises as we hear over there tonight, the poor fools would groan, moan and shout like a bunch of animals; seemingly they were getting rid of the devil preparatory to receiving something else. I hope they felt better afterwards. The biggest surprise of the whole evening however was that three converts were obtained and eleven others signified their intention of desiring the prayers of the members in their benefits.

This morning I attended Trinity as usual and listened to a real sermon from our regular pastor, Rev. Baker; you know he is some relation of the Mrs. Nash over in Burlington.”

Football Game

You asked what was the matter with Illinois' football team in the Chicago game . . . I told you in my last letter I think that the score should have been about 7 to 7 instead of 20 to 7, and the reason is that two of Chicago's touchdowns were made upon fluke plays.

One time the ball had been punted to Chicago's 35-yard line; they failed to try to catch it and as both teams were gathering around to put the ball into play again, one quick-witted fellow grabbed it and ran the whole length of the field for the touchdown. This was awful and even worse than the other which was caught and dropped by one of our men, only to be quickly recovered by Chicago and another touchdown added. As far as football was concerned I saw a better game played between Freeport and Elgin when I was home.”

12/15/1916

Debate Team

“You will no doubt wonder why I have been so slow in answering so I'm enclosing a clipping as a slight explanation. (*24 Debaters pass preliminary tryout*) This is my first hint at a notice in the line of debating and probably the only reason is that there are so many

so much worse than I was that I was named as one of the 24. There's no hope for the second try out because there are too many good ones but I'll be home before that one anyway.

Weather

Say its cold here do you know it? About four days ago it started getting "blizzardy" and we have been having regular Chicago weather since. Thermometer hovering right around zero and a wind that is powerful. Will have to shed my BVDs if this keeps on. Well folks, good night until Sunday."

12/17/1916

Weather II

"By the way how is the sleighing there, or have you been enjoying a little of this mild weather for the past few days and has the snow all melted off? Yesterday we had a slight change in the temperature and the thermometer climbed so high that the poor earth's white blanket entirely disappeared and in places we do not have that brown deserted looking barb of winter. Guess we are going to enjoy typical Champaign weather for awhile."

12/31/1916

Back, Resting, Studying

"Well you will wonder what this kid has been doing since his arrival in town Friday night. I slept all the way to Champaign and then came up to the house here and slept nine hour more so I felt pretty much fit for work Saturday morning.

Tomorrow I'll spend right here in the house about all day and in the evening I may go over to the party for the "Left Overs" at the Y but think I will probably rest in peace right in my little bed for I must have a little sleep this vacation in order to stand by me after school begins again. I'm hoping this finds you in good spirits again; thus with best wishes for a Happy New Year again, I'm going to close, as ever, your son, Gerald."

1/7/1917

Studying

"Well since I've been back I've read about 500 pages of Political Science, 150 of Economics and done a whole lot upon my long brief, which is part of our final exam in Public speaking.

I also did a lot of reading upon the spring debate question, in preparation for the second try-out Tuesday night. However yesterday I really began to get some common sense, for I realized how infinitesimal my chance of making the team would be with six or seven old debaters going out for it, how the time could be better spent in other directions with the finals only two weeks away.

Our Public Speaking class is scheduled for several little debates in the surrounding towns upon any question the people want debated, only consideration being that our expenses are paid. Public speaking or any method of writing or expressing my thoughts has always been my bug-bear, even though I did make the Extemp team at Elgin, but I really am now beginning to enjoy getting up before the class if I have anything to say.

Summer Job/Law Office

By the way, have you or can you try to get me placed in one of the law offices there at Elgin this sum as janitor, flunky, or any other fixture so that I can get a taste of the practical side of the question of law practice?"

1/14/1917

Maurice Reed/Pneumonia

"Well this is the end of a week of rather subdued emotions, for one of the boys, Maurice Reed of Sterling is threatened with pneumonia and in Burnham hospital...out of sorts Thursday morning...laid on a cot...awful vomiting spell...allowed the boys to call a Doctor who took him to the hospital...had a temp of 103. This morning the nurse told a couple of the boys that his folks ought to be (notified) for it looked very much like pneumonia.

This afternoon he got to cough up blood and his fever went up to 104. We called Mr Reed long distance. After some delay got a

good connection. We are to call again if Maurice is no better in the morning so Mr Reed can get the first train down here.

Believe me if I had been in Mauries shoes, I would have struck out for the (RR depot) and home instead of the hospital, but such is life. (See 1/17 ltr)

The Cook

Have just come up to the room from downstairs where we have been entertaining Mrs Fields our last year's cook who was over to pay us a visit. We were all as pleased as could be to see her again for even thou she is an (Afro-American) she got a mighty good heart and she certainly could cook.

Freshman/Mail

Am glad to hear that you are getting the letters on time, for I like to feel confident in the freshmen; but it was nearly ruined for awhile when we found one of them dropping the mail in a mail box about half way to the depot."

1/17/1917

AXP "Party"

"We had a little party here Sat. night for one of the boys who is going to Yale, and two others who are leaving, The Freshmen put on a nice little play for our entertainment. Was nearly as good as the Orpheum to see the boys perform for they carried out a play in 3 acts.

Sickness/ Maurice Reed

Tuesday we lost two more of the brothers. "Fat" Clark and "Bob" Lilley went over to the hospital for a week's vacation. They thus escaped a couple of finals but at the expense of making them up later on.

Maurice Reed came home yesterday after a 2-week siege and looks pretty frail. His mother is still here, but they expect to leave for Chicago today and make the journey home by easy stages.

The other two boys were let out this morning but look rather wane and pale. However last night I put one of my roommates to bed with a nice croupy cold. Frank Randall still complained of pain in

his lungs this morning. He doctored himself with kerosene and camphor while I contributed with turpentine and lard. It seems as though we are having a regular epidemic of colds and I'm glad I have passed thru the stage.

Farming

About the farming—it will hardly pay for me to start this semester and run only to April, for I would have only half the courses completed by time I dropped out. So really the better method would be not to register and drop out now, especially as the expense will be rather high.

Now folks I'm going to close and send this down to the noon train with one of the boys who is lucky enough to go home today. Think over the proposition (*about my farming*) to morrow and let me know Monday night. I realize all too well the condition of affairs there at home, and what it means to be sending me down here, so I am perfectly willing to drop out this year even though I realize it will probably be for good."

2/6/1917

Back at School

"I suppose you were expecting a letter from me this morning. Well listen to the schedule of my time since leaving Hampshire Sunday eve at about 7:20.

We arrived in Elgin at 8 o'clock; doctored a hot box there and left at 8:30. They tried to get a new engine there but couldn't so we made mighty slow progress. While we were there the (*gas*) lights died out in the coach so we traveled to Chicago in total darkness, interrupted by occasional trips of the conductor or brakemen thru the car. I got tired of amusing myself so I rolled up my overcoat and went to sleep.

Woke up at 9:30 to hear somebody say something about changing engines, then again at 10:15, just the time my train was supposed to leave Chicago. At last we arrived in Chicago (*11 o'clock*) and when I got off the train I saw an old freight engine on the front end and it had backed into the depot with us. Some service, wasn't it.

Well I got over to the I.C. depot by 1:45 with a good long wait until 2:10 the next train. So took out "David Copperfield" and read until nearly train time, then went over to the gate. Found Art Sanderson of Aurora was in the same pickle as myself so we got on the train together with Joe Siders, another Aurora boy.

The train was only an hour late getting out of Chicago, but I met Bosworth from Elgin, so we had quite a talk together until I fell into an uninterrupted sleep. Got into Champaign at 6:45 and up to the house here at 7, just in time for breakfast.

Yesterday was a big day in registration history. Over 3100 students went up to cast their lot for next semester's work. I'm glad its starting too for I'm anxious to get into work and bring home a slightly better mark than this last semester 84.15. That's pretty punk but then 19 hours--lowest 80, highest 87.

Farming

By the way Pa, have you talked to Floyd anymore about renting the farm or cooperating upon the working of it? If you folks are going to work together on it, and do it harmoniously, you'd better plan to tell him soon...You ought to get together and talk it over sensibly before Feb 15th and thus decide upon the procedure, also if you're going to need me—how soon?"

2/11/1917

Ma, help

"Now I've got a little job to be done and that is to put some re-enforcements in my brown pants. The knee is getting decidedly thin; also a spot over the right trousers pocket where my knife rubs through. It's too much of a job for me to mend myself, so I'm going to send it home by Parcel Post in the morning. Then when you send it back put in my razor which I left in the cupboard in the bathroom."

2/18/1917

Home Farm

"I sure was glad to hear from you, but it's too bad to hear about the farm being in such a dilapidated condition. What are you going to do about it? If you folks are having the same kind of weather up there as we are here you are doubtless thinking it's about time to

call the youngster home, for we certainly are having spring fever weather down here.

Mice

I proved to myself conclusively that the mice were doing the damage (to my handkerchiefs). The other night I found some mice "tracks" in a drawer of the chiffonier where I had dropped some handkerchiefs. Furthermore the handkerchiefs had holes in them. So I took the handkerchiefs out and set a trap. Two nights in succession it was filled and three other traps about the house increased the total to twelve dead ones. Some catch isn't it? I've proved conclusively that the acid is not to blame, but the poor handkerchiefs are about done for.

Parties etc.

Saturday night I saw Illinois trim Purdue and then went over to the party the Junior Girls gave to the boys. It is an annual affair and was carried pretty nicely, for we played all games from Drop the Handkerchief to dancing. Wicked school this is.

There is now quite a bit of activity to open picture shows in Champaign and we discussed this in Public Speaking. I had to take sides against the opening and gave a fairly logical presentation of facts. It might not have been a master-piece but it was 300% better than I could do the first of the year.

How's the farming proposition coming?"

2/25/1917

Studying Habits

"I did not have time yesterday afternoon (*to mail laundry home*) as I was over in Lincoln Hall reading up some cases in Political Science, for Wednesday. This semester I've vowed to keep all my work done up in advance, so that I can do some outside reading and not feel so awfully pushed for time at the last minute.

I've found out too that the more time I can spend in the daytime studying, the better my eyes get along, so I'm going to overwork them by daylight after this.

I've got one course however that's going to be interesting enough to take some extra work and that is my Political Science course—lot of cases upon the police power of the gov't whether acts for the general welfare of the people are constitutional or not.

Social Life

By the way I took Ruth Kerber (a sister of Miss Springer) to the Military Ball, my first spree since I've been down here, and in return have a bid to the Chi Omega formal in the Spring. Some frenzied fusser, I am not."

3/4/1917

Measles

"I'm lucky not to have measles however as my roommate "Torry" was broken out Friday morning and we were quarantined here for a ½ day. In the afternoon however we were all examined and the quarantine lifted except on his room. He could not go to the hospital as "pest house" part was full, so the doctor had us isolate him in one room of the house here and all the rest stay clear away.

However I'm exposed as much as he was when he got them so I'm afraid that I have as good a chance of taking them as he did. But if I find myself breaking out, or my eyes getting bad, I'm going to climb on board the first train north for I don't intend to waste two weeks down here in idleness; it's too expensive.

Armory Track Relays

Last night we boys went over to the Armory and saw Illinois get tramped on in a track meet. "The First Annual Relay Carnival." However the exhibition was great and colleges from all over the Middle West were present, from Michigan to Kansas and from Minnesota to Indiana. Brother Gantz ran in the four-mile relay event for Illinois and finished a close second to Chicago's man.

Car Ride

Today he (Brother Gantz) came over and took Bodie, Barnes and I out for a ride in his "fliver." We went clear out to Tolona about 10 miles south of here and back in about an hour, and coming back we faced a pretty stiff NW wind, but the top and side curtains were

up and I had my chinchilla overcoat and sweater, so I wasn't a bit cold; and oh my! but that ride was good."

3/18/1917

More Measles

"You wanted the latest news upon the measles epidemic. Well Friday it was my roommate's turn to get out of his two week's quarantine. However that very morning Don Cornell, a senior, went into the room to keep him company; yesterday Bob Lilley broke out with them and today Maurice Reed, the same boy who had a near attack of diphtheria last month, came down with them too. . .We had all three of them carted off to the pest house where they will probably have to stay for two weeks.

Well all this is bad enough but this afternoon two more of the boys were broken out. The one who was worst chose to take the 5:50 train for home. A comical coincidence--he went to a cadet hop with a sister of one of the boys here a week ago Friday night and today the brother called up that the girl had the measles too. We had a lot of merriment in poking fun at him.

While I'm not wishing for the measles, I think the chances are pretty good for getting them; seven out of thirty (in the house) have already come down with them. This is going to sort of spoil our formal too if the fatality increases; even though the doctor does pronounce them only German measles.

Even the mumps have appeared upon the scene down here; and the Tau Beta Pi honorary engineering is quarantined with them. I hope that none of our boys get them, for they are proving pretty serious and I don't want to run the risk of any more low marks in the house.

Patriotic Rally

Tomorrow night, along with eleven others of my fellow Scabbard and Blade neophytes, I have been asked to usher at a Patriotic Rally which will be held in the old armory so think that I will have to attend.

The enthusiasm is running high down here to be prepared in time of war, and there is a movement on foot to start classes in intensive military work in order to train a bunch of fellows to pass the Reserve Officers examination and be enrolled as a Reserve Officer—subject to call 15 days each summer at the base pay of \$1790 per year.

The proposition looks pretty good to me as well as most of the other for we figure that in case of war, universal conscription will have to be resorted to, and in that case it will be whole lot better for us to have our commissions as reserve officers than to go as common ordinary privates. If you have any objections to such procedure please say so before I go too far in this.

Expecting to be home to see you with a nice case of measles before long.”

3/26/1917

Uncertainty

“I received your letter this morning and am answering it right away for that promised check failed to materialize and little Dick is in dire straits. This is rather hurry up SOS call and I’m wondering if the relief ship will materialize or not.

Then can you mail Floyd’s stiff hat from around the house and mail it to me so I can get it in time for the formal. It should leave Hampshire by Wednesday afternoon at the latest. Don’t forget the pearl cuff buttons either please.

So far I have heard nothing more from the north corner sisters so I don’t know whether they are (able to come or not.) Would like to have a friend materialize from somewhere for the formal though, and hope they do materialize. “

Editor’s note: Dating & dances were never a high priority for Dad.

Leaving School

An April 2, 1917 entry in the journal of E.W. Dickson, Dad’s father, simply states, “Jo came home at midnight last night.” (Jo being the

name his father always called him.) It appears a combination of factors brought about this abrupt change including shortage of money, shortage of help on the farm, his father's age (69) and Dad's loyalty to his father. The campus measles and mumps epidemics may have triggered the departure.

Dad worked one year on the farm. He returned to the Univ of IL and got a temporary laborer job in the Ag Dept. His goals were summer ROTC camp, commission as 2nd Lt., and military service. He achieved all three goals.

Interim—WW I

3/24/1918

Back to C-U

"Arrived (at the fraternity) OK last evening and found the "bunch" just recovering from their weekend festivities. Was out seeing the sights today and saw a few old friends. Don't know when I'll be home so don't count on me for a couple of weeks at least. Will be home when I get broke.

4/21/1918

ROTC Camp Application

I am enclosing a clipping from the Chicago Tribune regarding the 4th officers Reserve Camp. Major McCaskey has just returned from Washington and is primed with information. He has a list of names about a mile long who wish to apply for the camp. Thanks to Bennie Smith and the student Colonel here, mine is up close to the top but that is only to obtain an application blank. I want to camp right on the trail of that Major until mine goes thru successfully. Until then I'm visiting at the Alpha Chi Rho house.

4/22/1918

Watching and Waiting

I was over to the Univ. this morning and found that they had treated me pretty well after all in regards to my credits for last semester's work. I received full credit and have now 105 credit hours, senior standing. It only takes 130 to graduate so I can easily get through in another year and graduate, that is if I had the inclination.

If the natives (people in Hampshire) get to talking too much tell them I'm seeing after my credits for last year as they were promised to all who left school to enlist in the national Defense League, either on farm or in the war.

Was over to see the Major again this morning too but nothing new has turned up in that direction. I went out to see the brigade drill this afternoon and am feeling pretty much discouraged over the way the standard has fallen down. Most all the seniors and the pick of the Junior and Sophs have been taken so the rest have to shift for themselves to a large extent."

4/29/1918

Ag Dept Laborer

Am sorry you haven't a very good opinion of my wonderful position at the U of IL here. But you see it is very similar to the one I've been holding down for the past year (*Farming at home*) so I thought I would be best qualified for cleaning up after and feeding cattle. The remuneration is 25 cents/hr with prospects of a raise to 27 ½ cents. We commence work at 6:30 in morn and end up from 5:30 to 7 at night.

Am also renting a room across the street in the AXP "annex". There are some empty cots in the house here. Frank Randall, Frank Cark and Kink Cole also live here.

5/11/1918

Called to Camp

"My letter Wed night told you I was crossed off the eligible list. Thursday I went over to the Major's office and he told me that it was a mistake. I was again confused with L.E. Dickson. He said he had orders to send only the 5 senior ROTC men to Camp Grant but expected to receive more orders at any time.

Last night when I got home from work I heard the news: all the Junior ROTC Class including Frank Torrence and myself are to report at Camp Taylor, Louisville, Ky.

This morning the papers came, and so we left on the train and arrived in Louisville Monday night. I thought I would come home

but re-considered because I want to be sure that I am in service and not count my chicks prematurely.

I am taking my suit-case and wearing my (ROTC) military suit but will probably send back all of this when I arrive in camp, as soon as I pass my physical exam and get clothing issued to me, as I will be only a private for 3 months.

I resigned my job in the Beef Cattle Dept in a hurry when I heard the news and got my pay, paid all my bills and have some left.”

5/15/1918

In the Army

“Arrived at Camp Taylor, Louisville for officer training. Got located, filled our little sack with straw, made our beds, got our clothing issued to us and went to bed at 9:30. It seems just like school, except that it is a long ways from home.

I passed the physical exam with flying colors. Called out again, this time to get our issue of rifles and pack. The rifles are dandies U.S. 1917 but rather greasy so we will need to do some cleaning.

We are attached to the 84th Army Division for training. Some say the orders are to flunk 50% out of officer training and back into the ranks so you can see what is ahead for me in order to win my shoulder bars—some good hard work from 5:30 to 9:30.”

8/18/1918 (ROTC Camp Letters not Included)

LT G. E. Dickson

“Just a few lines to let you know that I’m now wearing leather putties and have been assigned to the 335 Infantry Regiment. Goodbye furlough, for the above mentioned regiment is due to take a trip either to England, France, Italy or Siberia about the middle of this week so it is rumored.

If you want to see your dearly beloved son before he leaves camp, you will have to burn up the rails mighty soon. I don’t know as it will really be worth the trip down here, but that is up to you. I don’t know when we are supposed to leave—the way with all the rest of

this army game. Its do or die, but the Germans never made a bullet for me.

School was only discontinued yesterday after we had an inspection from Washington. This afternoon the first 95 in the school were marched up to headquarters and assigned. Have met many of my new fellow officers, and like the first appearance immensely. It is a darned sight better than having to go as a brick private.

Some day I'll be able to tell you a little about the amount of good your giving me a college education has done. You'd be surprised to know that even in this man's army they desire a man who has either graduated or had several years to his credit. Give my best regards to all and keep plenty for yourselves."

8/19 Exchange of telegrams

(From E.W.) Can we see you if start tonight? Answer at once.

(From G.E.) I appreciate it but leave soon.

E.Ws. Tuesday 8/21 journal:

"I got letter & wire from Jo that he would leave Camp Sherman Wednesday or Thursday so Mag & I got ready and started by train at 4 p.m. for Camp Sherman. Reached Chillicothe at 10:10 a.m. Found Jo at 12:30 and had dinner. We stayed all night at the Warner Hotel.

E.Ws. Thursday 8/23 journal:

We went over to Camp and had dinner together which was our last meeting with Jo for he had to go at 1 p.m. to get his men onto (rail) cars for east. We started downtown bidding him goodbye."

8/23/1918

En-route East

"Gee but I had a fine sleep from 8 P.M. between real sheets. We have a Pullman attached to the rear end for us officers, 14 only, and it hardly seems as tho we are in any war until I look up ahead and see these dozen coaches full of khaki-color soldiers. Over 500 on this train.

I am writing from the top of the caboose, as I wanted to find out from the conductor and brakemen where we were. We are now between Bath and Elmira N.Y. Characteristic of the farming here are the small farms and fields. This is a great valley for potatoes, buckwheat, beans, sweet corn, beets and in fact canning factories do a thriving business.

We pass thru your birthplace in a couple of hours Pa, Elmira, and then Binghamton and in Hoboken in the early morning.”

8/27/1918

Still En-route

“We had a wonderful trip down here as I started to tell you in the letter mailed from Elmira. When we arrived there we found the Red Cross “Canteen” girls at the depot to distribute milk and cookies to the soldiers. That sure looked good and the morale of the men rose about 25%.

At Binghamton 2 ½ hours later they distributed cigarettes and candy and gave the boys post cards for them to write home on. Not only that but they collected them and stamped them for the men. How’s that for service. At Scranton the men were given an hour’s exercise by us and some more cold milk and cookies by the Red Cross.

Well we arrived at Hoboken about 9’oclock Fri night. We had orders to leave the troops on the cars till 6 a.m. Sat. but nothing was said concerning the officers so all but two (to take charge of the train) took the subway across to 6th ave and 33rd. We then did a little patrolling of Broadway. Even though the theaters were just letting out it didn’t seem as big as I expected, more like Chicago.

Next morning we were ferried across to Long Island and here we are now getting settled and equipped. Two other divisions are here, one of them from Illinois.”

9/1/1918

New York City

"This pleasant Sunday afternoon finds me in charge of the company and since everyone has cleared out for the beach or New York, I have the orderly room and the typewriter,

Well we made a trip to the City Thursday afternoon and remained over till Friday noon. Three of us Lts were together and after getting a room at the Manhattan Hotel, and cleaning up from the grit and sand of Long Island, went out to see the sights. Luckily we ran across some relatives of one of the boys.

On the trip we counted six war vessels and a few transports riding at anchor on the Hudson, all camouflaged and ready to escort another convoy across—I shouldn't be much surprised if we were on board that convoy for we leave in the very near future.

We got back to the bright lights just in time for the opening number of the "Follies" at the New Amsterdam. The chorus included some thirty or forty typical chorus beauties and say I can't blame some of these New York millionaires, with more money than brains, perhaps for falling for them. Little Ann Pennington proved to be the feature number with her dancing and the wit that flowed around there was enough to make a mummy laugh.

By the way I made out my allotment paper today to take effect beginning October 1st. \$50 will be deducted from my pay every month. I'll try to save more than this of course, and send that back to you from across."

9/2/1918

Leaving the U.S.

"Have all my goods packed so dropped over to the Y to write you a farewell letter. We leave camp for the pier at 3 AM tomorrow. Suppose we will be on our way out of the harbor at sunrise or a little later. Secrecy is the keynote of our movements.

Last night we celebrated (four of us "shave tails") our last full night in the country by going to Rockaway Beach and taking in the

recreation. The beer signs and roadhouses are scattered about but they didn't bother us very much for all the boys were tea-totalers, at least they have to be while in the army.

We spent the time on roller coasters, slides, and dancing. Met some regular queens from the suburbs of N.Y and quite enjoyed the evening. Seems as though the people here in the east realize there is a war and put themselves out lots more to entertain the khaki-clad youths. I quite enjoyed my farewell dance with an American lassie. However she can't come up to some of the mid-west maidens."

9/18/1918

England

"Our days in this rest camp are rather numbered so thought I had best drop you a few lines. I did not tell you in my last letter what place we landed but it's a seaport just north of where "Bud's parents" came from.

Lt Hampton and I were together last night and explored all we possibly could. That's one thing I've resolved to do--every chance I can, get a pass and see the surroundings. First we got a hot bath and cleaned up for while on board ship we were rather short on hot bath water. Later it will be still more scarce.

The weather we have met so far is far from pleasant. The sky opens up with a downpour nearly every hour. At that we are lucky for some of the soldiers who have been here three weeks say this is the best weather they have had.

Take good care of yourselves and make plans for a trip to warmer climate this winter."

9/24/1918

France (10 page ltr)

"At last I have found a little breathing spell. I cabled you of my safe arrival in southern France. We are in the balmy southern part of France. It seems more like a fairy story—as though we were living in scenes of the Goose Girl and would soon wake up to find our head pounding with grim reality. That's probably what will happen.

We will waken when we start north again but this is a wonderful country to live in.

The season seems a bit behind ours and we are billeted in a little village where they never have billeted Americans. Blackberries and grapes are both ripening and every hedgerow is a thicket of berry bushes.

The French sure do know how to cook. The food just melts in our mouths and the wine—it's served with every meal same as we serve lemonade in the states—light wine only as intoxicants are forbidden soldiers here as in the states.

I'm sure glad we are getting our training here rather than in England for the climate is so much better. However we have to take our hats off to England as being about the biggest little country on the face of the earth."

10/7/1918

Still Training

"Just a few lines to let you know that I am well and hoping you are the same. We are doing merely routine work just as fast as possible.

According to the French newspapers, peace is the principal topic of gossip among the Germans. Must be the Yankees are stepping on their tails too fast and they want time to re-organize. Hope they don't get an armistice tho until they suffer as they've made Belgium and France suffer.

By the way you may get a letter in French for my hostess says she wants to write to my "mere". Better look about for a French interpreter. She is a kind hearted old soul. She brings in flowers and puts them by the picture of "Hamp's" wife. Isn't that a queer custom though? Several of the other boys also tell of the same things happening to their pictures."

(Dad's Unit was assigned as replacement to the 1st Division in October '18 and moved up to the front line.)

10/12/1918

Moving Up

"Have made my change of station and assigned to the 3rd Battalion of the 26th Infantry, 1st Division and bivouacked in the region of shell-holes and cannon thunder. Looking forward to the time when I can get a hand in too. This division will certainly give me that opportunity for it was the first regular army division in France. I'm mighty glad I was switched from the life of "depot brigade".

By the way I want to tell you about a sight we passed on the way here. It was so pitiful it would make one's blood boil—a whole field of horses dying by inches. The poor brutes had been gassed and were slowly waiting for death to overtake them—some were already out of their misery, others lying down nearly there, and still others, but mighty few, were grazing. Oh these dirty Huns have got a real debt to pay for, to say nothing about all these ruined villages, now but a heap of stones and people dead.

Have just been watching a bunch of German prisoners going past. They certainly were a dejected looking lot. One M.P. was riding along behind them herding them much like we would cows back home. They tell us that is a common sight."

11/17/1918

Taste of Warfare

"Well folks, I got in on the finish anyway. Our division managed to participate in this last scrimmage and I got just a taste of warfare as we scouts were pretty active, hunting out machine gun nests, etc, and dodging not infrequent shells. More about that when I get back though.

We had the news here that the armistice was signed last Monday and immediately heaved a sigh of relief for now we can light fires, etc. out in the open and not be afraid of hostile planes dropping bombs on us.

As a result of this job (billeting officer) I believe I was among the first to cross the line this morning. Met many groups of liberated prisoners—French, Romanians, Greeks, Serbians and one or two Americans. The French are tickled to see the Americans here after none but Boche for so long.

Some of the poor devils (French) are coming back to awful disappointments though. Some towns have nothing left but a pile of brick or stone, so badly and hard has the ground been fought over.”

(Letter written from Coblenz, Germany)

1/22/1919

Reaction to Armistice

“By the way you asked about our celebration of the signing of the armistice. It was considerably like yours. We had been relieved two days before and had been hiking steadily, bivouacking at night in woods with no fires, eating corned beef and hard tack when we could get them.

Our kitchens and supplies had gotten mixed up in the traffic on the hard roads we traveled across fields etc. sometimes water up to your ankles, and mud, nuf said. We hadn't had a warm meal in nearly 2 ½ days and nothing to eat that morning for breakfast.

However we were all feeling fairly content, we had been relieved, and would meet up with our kitchens by 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Everyman that was left was traveling on sheer reserve and grit, but somehow we were deadened to all normal senses. It was merely a steady plodding onward, mud up to your ankles.

It had been drizzling all night and was still keeping it up, when the Major and Adjutant who had been riding ahead met Col. Teddy Roosevelt and a couple of higher officers. The Adj. thought he'd pass the good news back along the column so he started it in front. *(Dad venerated Teddy Roosevelt the rest of his life)*

I was marching with the remainder of the Scout Platoon in rear of the 1st company and sensed what was coming. Did the men get enthusiastic? Well not so you could notice it. Instead they thought

something more was being put over on them for they merely grunted a few good army cuss words, and kept on plodding.

Well after we reached the kitchens and had a good warm meal the morale rose 1000%. Fires were lit and as darkness fell the hillsides looked more like Coney Island. Well so much for our celebration. I wish I could picture things as they actually were, and yet maybe it's a good thing for I might shatter a few delusions about what a snap our method of warfare is."

(Immediately after the armistice the 1st Division was assigned to duty in the Army of Occupation. Dad was stationed in Coblenz, from Dec '18 until Sept '19, where his college courses in German served him well.)

12/20/1918

Coblenz, Germany

"We crossed the Moselle River the first of December and began our journey as pretty and interesting a trip as I ever expect to take. We are now at Journey's end and as I look back on the trip as a real education. The natives in the little villages are pretty much accustomed to seeing foreigners, as it's a great honeymoon resort.

We marched by easy stages, just fast enough to arrive at the Rhone according to the armistice. Most everyone took the soldiers with a show of willingness, as they are familiar with the terms of the armistice in fact some appear to be cordial."

2/2/1919

Settled in

"The mailman left quite a packet of letters, among them four letters from you folks. I'm mighty glad to hear from you and to know you are both well and managing to keep warm in the big house. But when you talk about snow of 6 to 8 inches and I see no shoveling here I think I have at least one thing to be fortunate for in the Army of Occupation. We may be the last to get home but we certainly have some fine living accommodations here."

(Editors Note: 25 to 30 letters written from Jan through Aug 1919 while in the Army of Occupation in Coblenz are not part of this

*book as they say little about "Finding a Home Away from Home."
"Perhaps another person will edit them in the future.*

Dad returned to the states Sept. 2, 1919. There were many parents and home-town friends hoping he would be in Hampshire for the big September 6 celebration for returning veterans. Instead the 1st Division was selected to march in the New York City and Washington D.C. parades. A letter from his Dad conveys how proud he was that his son's Division was selected to be in those parades.)

9/4/1919

Return to USA

"This is the first evening in the good old USA; have just finished dinner. We had a very pleasant trip and extremely good "chow". The Red Cross met us at the docks with pie a'la mode, buns and a cup of milk. The thing most appreciated was an ice-cold apple given out by the Red Cross. Right here let me say that is one organization that has certainly functioned during this war.

The paper today says the division will parade as a unit Monday the 10th in New York. No word on Washington, D.C. If we do manage to get out of the service in the next couple of weeks, I'll put in for the remainder of my course at the U of IL I think."

9/12/1919

Camp Potomac

"Just a few lines in haste to let you know that we have arrived in the capitol city OK. We de-trained yesterday morning but did finish up late in the afternoon and got out to camp to in time to have a good hot bath clean clothes, etc. thence bed. I sure do feel better now.

Since landing in Camp Merritt the Supply Co has been on the move. We drew all new kitchens, ration carts, wagons, horses and mules, and had the job of assembling most of the wagons in the bargain.

It was cooler and cloudy in New York for the parade and the streets were banked with humanity from 110th Street clear down 5th Ave to the breaking up pocket at 9th to 12th street. The Supply

and Hdqs Co with all the Regmtl Transportation took the ferry to Jersey City at once and entrained for Washington that afternoon.”

(After the parade Dad was able to return home and spend a few days with his parents. Although 10 days late, he returned to the Univ of IL and AXP for his senior year.

The letters from Sept '19 to Jan '20 bespeak of an X-serviceman anxious to finish studies, not surprisingly as he had been absent to farm for one year and then 17 months in military service. By taking 19 credit hours for 6 semesters, he only needed one more semester and a course off campus for his B.A.)

Sept 1919 to Jan 1920 Final Semester

9/28/1919

Settling In

“Just a few lines as I came away in such a hurry I didn’t get an opportunity to say and do everything I should. About the pistols—I told Floyd (*brother*) he could have the one I left in the kitchen. The shells for it are also in the musette bag. The old pistol that was with me thru the show, along with the holster, belt, etc. I would like for you to keep there at home unless you have use for them.

I had my suitcase removed tonight on the 4 o’clock train either accidentally or premeditated and so am travelling rather light to Champaign. I left only one means of identification in it—my empty money belt with identification card. If any honest person removed it by mistake they will probably write but I’m giving it up as lost. The shirts are really the most loss, outside of the suitcase.”

10/1/1919

Settling In II

“Now I want to bother you some more. Will you send me some clothes in an old suit box--couple clean shirts, a suit of underwear, sox, towels, and handkerchiefs.

Am sorry I left such a mess there for you to clean up. Really shouldn’t have brought such a mess of stuff home (*from Germany*) but I figured that most of it would come in handy around home.

About the suitcase, well lets not worry for unless it falls into the hands of an honest person its gone for good and all the talking and worrying out will not bring it back. I did all that was possible that evening in Chicago, especially with my name in it.

I'll confess I felt pretty blue that night and came very near taking the next train for Hampshire. However it wasn't such a bad omen after all for I made fine connections down here, and the AXP boys here have done everything to help me out.

I completed registration and started attending classes--nice way to spend a leave of absence isn't it--but otherwise I'd be too far behind to catch up. Will easily have enough credits to graduate next June and some to spare. This semester I'm taking Agricultural courses (*as electives*) including stock judging, Dairy Cattle specializing in Breeding and Feeding.

Registration this year is the largest ever. More than seven thousand, and many of the freshmen classes were overcrowded and closed. You would be surprised too at the number of old timers back--some of the classes of '17 & '18—my own class 1919. I can hardly walk without meeting a new face.

Everything is fine here except the prices and they sure do soak you for everything. I hardly dare even look at a suit of clothes for fear that too would cost more money (than I can afford).

P.S. Don't worry about the little nurse anymore for I wouldn't marry the best girl in the world, even if she would consent."

10/5/1919

Settling In III

"Just a few lines before I start in studying tonight. I've been rather working my fool head off endeavoring to catch up with the few days back work. I want to make this semester's work the best yet and it's going to be stiff going for I'm taking a bit of extra work. That means no more Orpheum or shows, thus saving money, rather essential commodity too, isn't it?

Last night was Sorority Open House night, but I couldn't take it in. Most of the boys went and say we have a better-looking bunch of co-eds here this year than ever before.

This noon I was invited out to a chicken dinner by one of the AXP boys, Will Stephens, whose folks live in west Champaign. Spent the afternoon with his folks and sister and they certainly did their best to make me feel at home.

The sister was the one Art Bodenschatz was going with and we adopted each other as Brother and Sister from the first. She graduated last year and is now quite grown up. She's teaching school in Rantoul, and is waiting for her fiancé to get out of medical school—5 years, some wait. Tonight I've a hundred pages of Political Science to finish up for class tomorrow, and then I'll be up to date on work."

10/6/1919

Army Discharge

"I'll be home for this weekend for sure but don't know whether I can make it Fri night as I've heard several conflicting stories about the length of time it has taken officers to get thru at Fort Sheridan, some taking as much as three days.

Dairy Course Instructor

By the way did I tell you about meeting Mason Campbell who graduated from Elgin High School with me? Well he's instructor in the dairy course over here in the Ag. School and I'm taking one of the courses. Now how is that for a coincidence? I intend to do some fraternizing on the outside as soon as I get entirely caught up with back work."

10/23/1919

Newsy

"Just a few lines to let you know that I'm as well and happy as it is possible to be just before bed time on a Sunday night in a big city with three days studying and a big Thanksgiving dinner to enjoy in the next full week. (*Nice change from a year earlier*)

Laundry

My laundry was delivered to 204 E John St a week ago instead of 104 E John as it should have been. I'm afraid it will be almost an impossibility to try to prove to Uncle Sam that he should compensate me for its loss. I do want to thank you for the way the things were done up, especially the gloves, by gum, they look good enough to wear to a wedding—providing if I only had an invitation.

Football Game

Say did you hear or read about the results of the football game Saturday and how Illinois is again Champion of the Big 10? It sure enough caused excessive super-abundance of enthusiasm here, you can rightly believe. We had a snake dance and everything.

With heaps of love and bushels of kisses (*as my roommate says to his girl*). I remain as ever devotedly; *until Thurs Dick*

1/11/1920

Winding Down

"Have just returned from accompanying Ray Orput part way home. Had him over to dinner this noon and enjoyed a fine visit with him. He seems to be a mighty clean straightforward chap, and I hope I can find some way to help him before I leave school.

Next weekend will be lighter so I have a notion to write Don Melms and Lincoln Scott to come down and I'll show them around and perhaps interest them in school here. If you should see them you might ask them if it would be OK. If they would rather come Fri. night they can see a good basketball game here Sat. night. when we play Ohio State. We beat Purdue last night by a very close score 33 to 31. It was the first conference game of the year. If they can only keep it up and get that championship too."

1/14/1920

Comments About People

"Was glad to get Uncle Bill's announcement (50th wedding anniversary) and read it thru with much interest. Say he must have a friend on that newspaper from the way in which he gets written up all the time. Doesn't seem as tho his 50 years of married life are resting very heavily on his shoulders.

Sorry to hear that Mrs Farrel passed away but perhaps she has gone to a better place after all. As Uncle Lafe says we should not mourn for her loss, but rather prepare ourselves, so as to be ready when the One above calls for us. Are you ready? Received no announcement of Breeze's wedding. Guess they think I needed to be informed of it—nit. You should have (*an announcement*) there of Frank Randall's wedding, too, have you?

Final Exams

School work is going fine, and it's a great life. Hardly seems possible that exams start only a week from Saturday, but such is the case. And then it won't be long until it's all over and I'll be riding out of here. Throw that special in English this Saturday, and then start cramming for finals so cross your fingers for me please."

1/19/1920

Campus Visit

"Don (Melms) arrived here Friday evening and didn't lack for excitement any of the time he was here I guess. We took in a show that evening and the next morning I started him out with "Heine" my freshman roommate to see the campus while I took a special exam. Passed OK and Sat A.M. I took him around to the different places he will have to visit next fall in order to register.

Then Sat evening we went to the basketball game and saw Minnesota get beaten 41 to 19, not such a half bad score, was it? Don thought he should get back to Chicago so we got up early Sunday morning and he took the 7:30 north. We both were sorry that Lincoln Scott couldn't come along with him. However he may decide to come next fall anyway.

Studying

I've been studying to beat the band since I've been back in order to clear up this exam and get out of here by the end of this semester. I'll probably get out of here on Wed and be home that evening. I have to be in Dixon by Feb. 5 (*job as milk tester*)."

1/25/1920

Journey's End

"Sunday evening and all is well. Took my first exam yesterday morning and this proved to be not so bad—I think I'll graduate after all if all the rest prove to be as good.

This morning I spent getting straightened around for my next exam Tuesday morning and in the afternoon another one. Don't know whether I can get out of here before a week from Tuesday or not. You know I'm trying to get a couple exams set ahead so as to get started working on my job by Feb. 1 but have grave doubts as to the outcome.

My mind is a bit hazy tonight so can't get my thoughts assembled to write decently. Intend to go to bed soon so nite! nite! Keep well, don't overdo. As ever, your son, *G. E. Dickson*

Postscript—A home of His Own

Beginning Feb 5, 1920 Dad worked in Dixon, IL going farm to farm as milk tester and in the process picked up valuable ideas on dairy farming. His father, E.W. died of a heart attack June, 1923. Dad married a young widow Esther Ball 8/2/24. They had 3 sons and a daughter.

*When Dad bought his brother's share of the 222-acre farm he realized his goal of **A HOME OF HIS OWN**. The farm-house burned down March '28 but family and friends helped build a new house.*



Times were tough in the Depression of the '30s so in 1938 Dad, along with farming, began a 30+ year career working in Chicago as Supervisor of Federal Milk Market testing, a job that combined his leadership skills with his background in the dairy industry.

While he loved farming he discouraged his sons from farming "it is too uncertain". Dad sold the farm in 1964 and retired. He died of a heart attack in 1972 at age 77, after a life well lived. From 1948-54, when I was an Alpha Chi Rho, Dad faithfully returned to the U of IL for Homecoming and Dad's Day. He loved football games, the band, and Alpha Chi Rho. He lived out the motto,

"Our strong bond shall ne'er be broken"

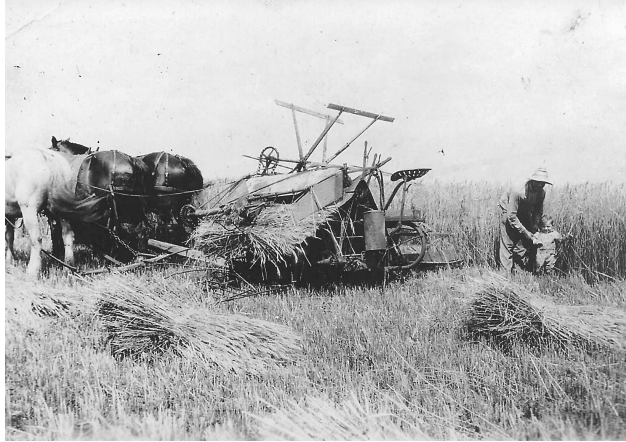
Gerald E Dickson, Hampshire, Ill



*Elgin High School
June 1913*



*Univ of IL 2nd Lt, ROTC
1916*



*1927 Cutting grain with the help of
Gerald II*



The family farm circa 1949

Addenda

When Dad wrote weekly letters, he unwittingly left three things:

1. A journal for his progeny giving a peek of genes they would inherit.
2. A handbook on potential benefits of fraternity life for fraternity leaders and those considering a fraternity.
3. An example of how values are formed in transformative years.

Progeny

Who wouldn't like to know more about the genes they inherited?

Fraternity Life

To Dad fraternity benefits were security, stimulation and a step up.

- p. 8 "social etiquette and social courtesies"
- p. 13 "worth as much as the book education"
- p. 18 "pretty nice bunch of fellows"
- p. 18 "a change for the better since he joined the fraternity"
- p. 20 "they seem to be fine fellows"
- p. 22 "it seems as if I've lived here about all my life."
- p. 23 "we candidates enjoyed the (initiation) about as well as the members"
- p. 25 "it's mighty good to meet...different types of people"
- p. 27 "everyone...mighty well pleased with the good time they had at the formal"
- p. 29 "It is hard to express...how great is our spirit of exuberance over (joining AXP national)"
- p. 29 "One thing a fraternity does...that really is good is get him into some activity besides routine school work"
- p. 30 "we are full fledged AXPs...and we feel pretty good now that we can be called a National Organization."
- p. 31 "this isn't a day dream about our fraternity average being second (of all fraternities)"
- p. 34 "I enjoyed...AXPs dance and we sure had a dandy time...at the Champaign Country Club"
- p. 49 (no job; not in school) "renting a room across the street in the AXP 'annex'. There are some empty cots."
- p. 61 (returning vet, suitcase stolen) "the AXP boys here have done everything to help me out."
- p. 62 "invited out to a chicken dinner by one of the AXPs, they certainly did their best to make me feel at home"

Values

From the events in these letters flowed admirable lifelong principles.\

“Finding a Home Away from Home”

This is the story of a small-town boy’s transition to a big University (Illinois) and finding a home away from home. Along the way there were detours—a year working on the family farm and service in WW I. The book is based on excerpts from hundreds of letters written to his parents from 1914-1920. The letters are a portrait of Dad’s formative years.

The book was written for the 100th anniversary of Dad’s fraternity and for his nearly 100 progeny. However re-reading the letters revealed the task was much more than this. It brought out the truth for everyone that early-year habits and activities become qualities that define our later years.

There is a saying that “what we think and do is what we become” but it is rare to have such a wealth of information to affirm the value of good early habits and experiences. The trail of letters calls for a new awareness and appreciation of how values are formed and a realization of how much Dad lives on today in his children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and beyond.



Gerald E Dickson circa 1955

Dad’s qualities included *helping others, honesty, morality, inquisitiveness, patriotism, frugality, diligence, faith, and caring.*

Would that we would all leave such a legacy.

“Well done thou good and faithful servant”

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