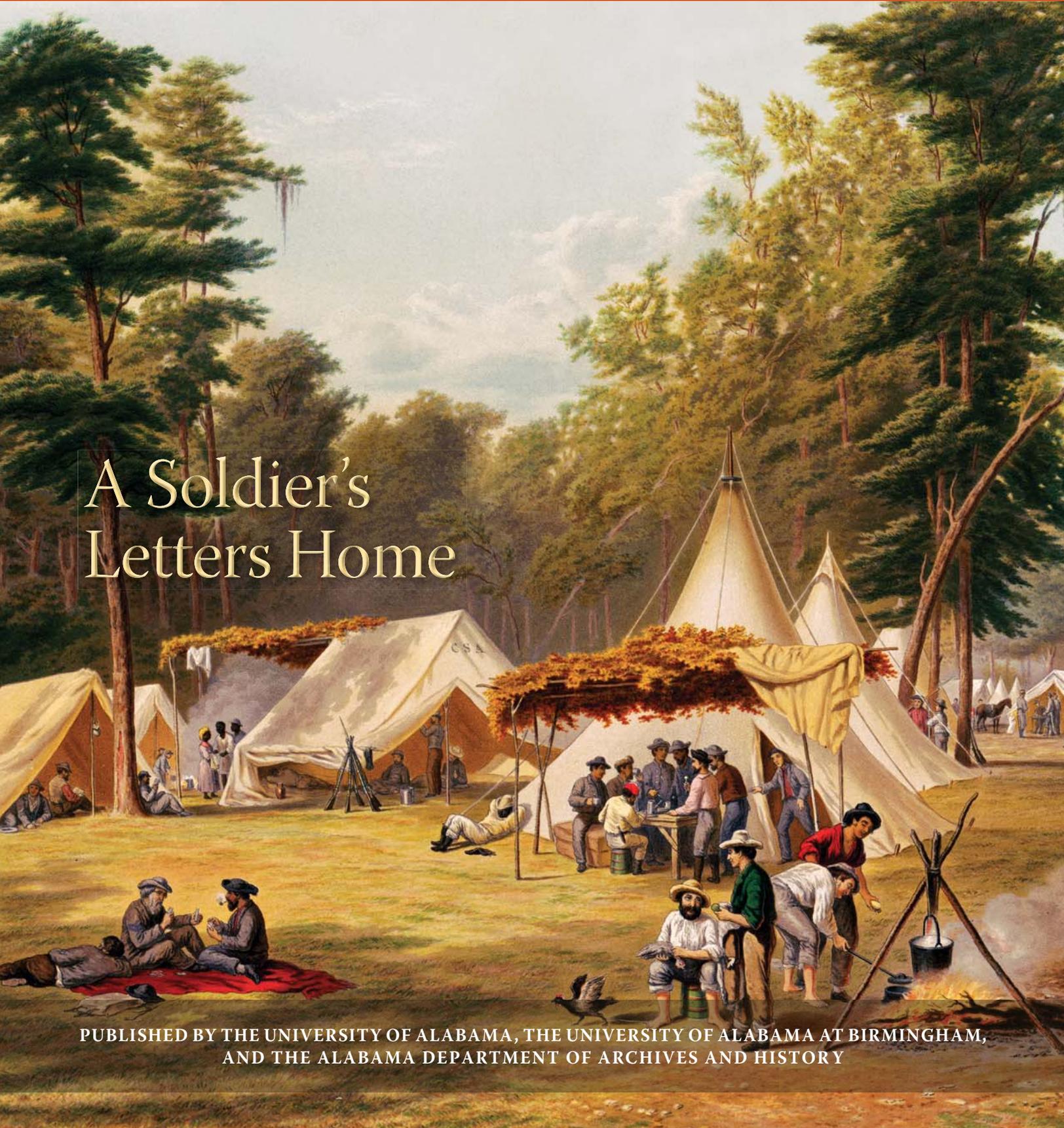


Alabama Heritage

A Soldier's Letters Home



PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA, THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM,
AND THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

Alabama Heritage

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From the Archives

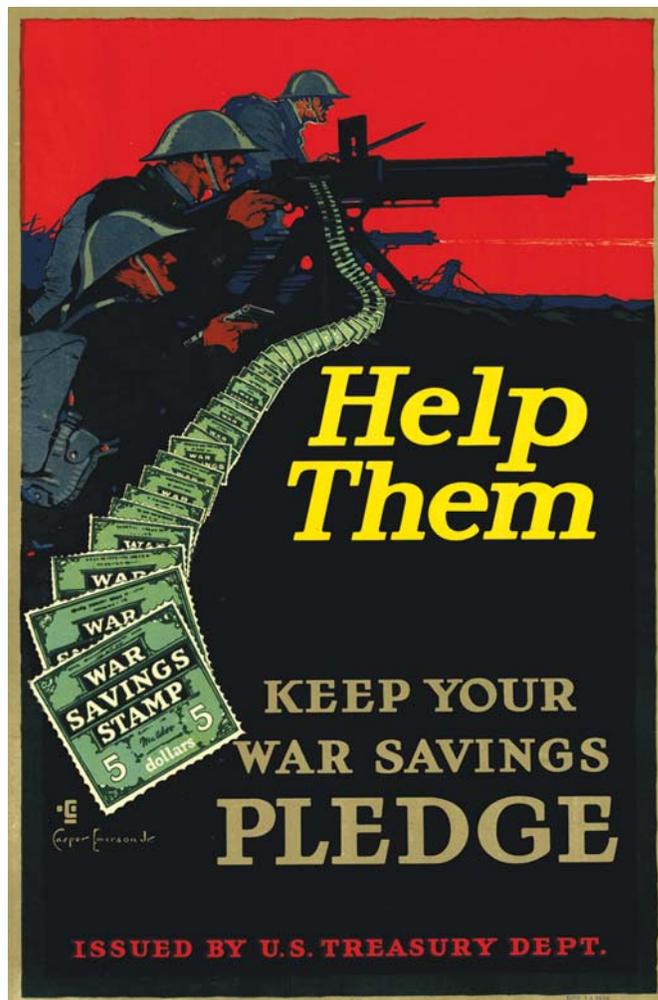
THE ART OF THE GREAT WAR

BY KERI HALLFORD

As Alabama prepares to commemorate America's involvement in World War I during the war's centennial, many brave service members will be lauded for their acts of valor. These heroes deserve the accolades they will receive over the coming years, but what about those on the home front who gave freely of their time and skills to help servicemen abroad? People from around Alabama and the nation arranged for speeches, carpools, fundraisers, and even book and record drives to benefit the war and support the troops before and after deployment. A lasting testimony to this work can be seen in the wartime posters that still survive.

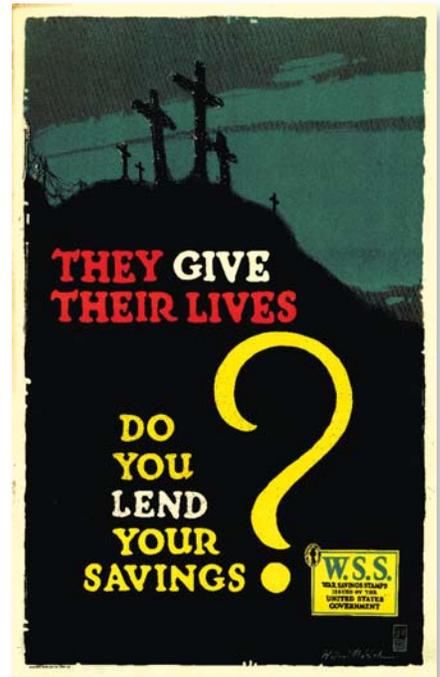
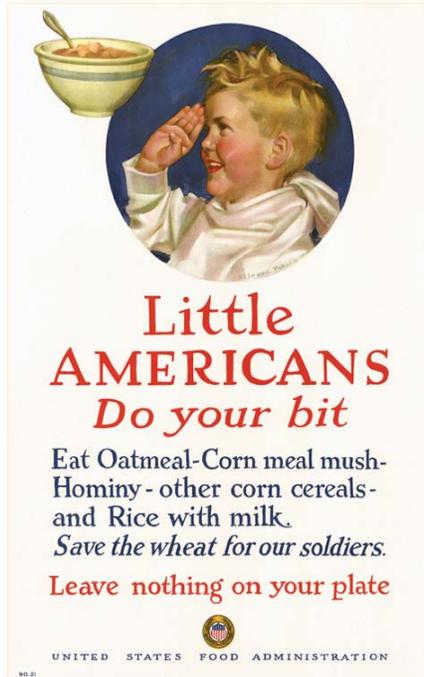
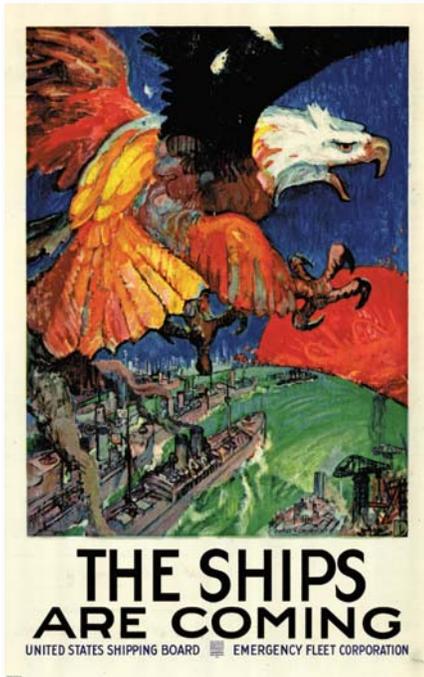
The creators of these posters include scores of renowned painters, sculptors, illustrators, and artists who volunteered their skills for the good of the nation. Many of these talented people were unable to join the armed forces, so they contributed their artistic talents to the war effort instead. Their collective work, the largest body of art placed in the public domain in our time, contains 1,438 items of the most remembered and iconic images of Americana. It is no wonder that many of the most lasting impressions from World War I result from the popular graphic posters that were produced in the United States during the war.

The collaboration between artists and those in charge of the war effort began shortly after the United States entered the war. In 1917, after years of discouraging American involvement in the war, Pres. Woodrow Wilson knew that there was an immediate need to change public sentiment in favor of joining the fight. Within one week of the United States' declaration of war, he set in motion the Committee on Public Information (CPI). News reels, speeches, and newspaper articles produced by the CPI began to circulate almost immediately, but George Creel, the committee's head, believed that painted and printed pictures were also needed to "build morale, arouse the spiritual forces of the



Strong graphics and vivid colors characterize US World War I posters. This example by Casper Emerson urges citizens to buy war savings stamps. (All Alabama Department of Archives and History)

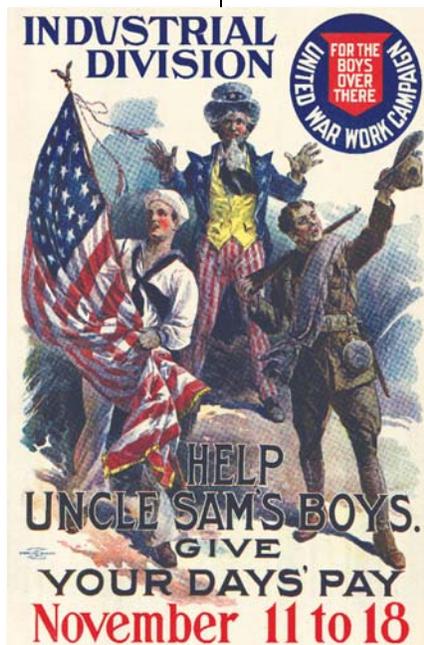
Nation, and stimulate the war will of the people." Within two weeks he began to assemble a group of artists that would ultimately become the Division of Pictorial Publicity (DPP). Charles Dana Gibson, the highest-paid illustrator of the time and creator of the famous "Gibson Girl" image so popular in the early twentieth century, was appointed the head of the division. Gibson and 317 other artists worked



in offices across the country to bring the war effort to the people, and the talented group created 700 posters, 310 advertisements, and 287 cartoons of lasting Americana.

The people of Alabama are the fortunate owners of one of the largest and most pristine collections of World War I posters in the country. The Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) collection of these posters is rich with iconic, celebrated works but also contains an assortment of relatively obscure posters which have not been reproduced widely, if at all. Founding director Thomas McAdory Owen actively sought posters and other materials during and after the war, contributing to the ADAH's diverse collection. Additional posters were acquired shortly after the completion of the state archives building in 1940.

Posters in the ADAH collections reflect the fifty-eight collaborative partnerships that DPP established with agencies such as the United States Food Administration and the American Red Cross. Some feature food rationing, home front life, military branches, savings bonds, and local organizations. Others contain chilling anti-German images or uplifting depictions of children frolicking. The collection is vast and varied, and as American poet Wallace Irwin ob-



Examples of posters issued by various government agencies (clockwise from top left): the Emergency Fleet Corporation of the United States Shipping Board; the United States Food Administration; the Committee on Public Information; and the Industrial Division of the United War Work Campaign.

served upon seeing a wartime poster, they show us “how art put on khaki and went into action.”

A new temporary exhibit, *Art of the Great War*, opening in the fall of 2015 at the Museum of Alabama, will feature many of these beautiful and poignant posters from the ADAH collection.

The exhibit will highlight the artists who created them and the importance of these posters to the war effort and morale at home. *Art of the Great War* will be on display through early spring 2016. For more information, visit www.archives.alabama.gov, or call (334) 242-4364.

Keri Hallford is the archivist of oversized collections for the Alabama Department of Archives and History. She received an MS in library and information studies from Florida State University and a BA in history with a minor in art history from Auburn University. She lives in Opelika, Alabama, with her husband and two beloved mutts.

Alabama Heritage

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