

# Chauncey E. Cook Letters

A lesson plan related to this material on the [Wisconsin Historical Society website](#).

Cooke, Chauncey H. *Soldier Boy's Letters to His Father and Mother, 1862-1865*.

Mondovi: *The Mondovi Herald*, c. 1919.



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HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

Camp Randall, Madison, Wis.

Co. G. 25th Wis. Vol. Inf.

Dec. 16, 1862.

Dear Parents:

After just one week of varying incident from the time of leaving my old dear home I am seated to write to you. We did not find our regiment at Winona as we expected, they had gone to La Crosse. There were 27 of us in the crowd so we hired three liveries and drove all night and reached La Crosse at 6 o'clock in the morning. We nearly swamped in the Black river crossing McGilvery's ferry the ice was running so, but we got over all right. We stayed in La Crosse one night and came on to Madison the next night. The people of La Crosse were good to us, they gave us a fine dinner in the biggest hall in town but mother it did not taste half as good as the last one you gave me of bear meat and venison and hot biscuit and honey. It may be I did not do right when I sneaked out of the house and got Billy and rode away without saying good bye, but I couldn't help it. I knew it hurt you to say good-bye and that's why I did it.

Well, we are in Madison, the Capital of the state. How long we are to stay nobody knows. They say we need drilling and must get more disciplined before we go to the front. Well I hope we won't stay here long. These barracks are awful cold, and my bunk is on the top tier, next to the shingles--too hot in the evening--cold in the morning. I am wearing father's moccasins yet. I didn't get time to buy me boots in La Crosse or Winona.

Tell father to use my money and buy him some more. We are to be paid soon and I will send you some money. You need not lay it up as you did before but use it, and don't think of me, I am all right. I never want to see father wear patches again. I don't believe this war is for long. I expect to be home next year to help with the work. Maybe not, but we'll see.

I forgot to tell you that we came in the cars to Madison from La Crosse. It was a new experience to me, I was wide awake the whole way. I was afraid we were off the track every time we crossed a switch or came to a river. At the towns, girls swarmed on the platforms to ask the boys for their pictures and to kiss the best looking ones. A young Frenchman, we called him the pony of the regiment because he was so small and quick, got the most kisses. He was so short the boys held him by the legs so he could reach down out the windows to kiss the girls. Many times some old fellow held the girls up so she could be reached. It was fun anyway.

I never think but I am all right, except when I try to double quick for a half hour or so. My wind gives out. Lieutenant Parr says, "Your measles stay with you yet." "Warm weather," he says, "will fix you all right." Love to all.

Your son,  
Chauncey

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Madison, Wis., Dec. 25th, 1862,  
Co. G., 25th Regt.

Dear Mother:

You see my paper don't have the regulation picture on it of Soldiers in file or in battle array. I am tired of such flummery. The meaning of the whole thing is to make money for the inventor and not for the soldier. We are told that the life of the Nation is at stake, and every fellow that enlists offers himself as a martyr to save his country. I was thinking these things over last, about 2 P. M. in the morning when I was nearly froze and the relief guard came round and I was off duty to go to my tent and get some sleep. It seems like foolery to the common soldier that for two hours we must stand in a temperature of 30 or 40 degrees when we are a thousand miles from the enemy. I had to walk and walk to keep from freezing. The mercury was down near 40 below zero and the guard house where we sat down between reliefs or lay down was little better than out doors. The health of our Regiment is none too good. One man dies on an average every day. As I write this letter the drum is beating. The food we get is to blame for our bad health. The boys threaten a riot every day for the bad beef and spoilt bread issued to us and all this in our home state of Wisconsin. I went to meeting yesterday both morning and evening. In the morning at the Baptist, in the evening at the Episcopal church. The preacher discussed the state of the Union. I thot he talked a bit like a traitor. He was sorry the states should go to war over the question of slavery. He hoped the Union would be preserved and he thot Uncle Tom's Cabin was much to blame for the war. Capt. Dorwin said the preacher ought to live in South Carolina. There is talk that we will get pay tomorrow. I have sent a record of our company home. Hope you got it. I shall send you a lot of clothing just before we leave. Remember me to Uncle Edward Cartwright. It was kind of him to ask so often about me. I wonder where Ez and Ed are. They don't say a word. You remember they went in the 2nd Cavalry.

I am glad father had such good luck getting deer this fall, you will have lots of venison this winter. It is too bad the Elk are all gone or killed off. I know father is sorry. He blamed the Sioux Indians for scaring his game but the St. Louis hunters and the Farringtons of Mondovi have spoiled his hunting more than the Indians. I hope he will stop hunting bears alone. Its a dangerous business. Old Prince is a dear good dog but a bear is too much for him at close quarters. Is his jaw all right again? Every letter I get from home I expect to hear of Jenny's death. She is bound to rub her red blanket off in the brush and the first hunter that sees her will shoot her for a wild deer. I wonder what Claffin's people tho't when she ran in their bedroom and laid down to get away from the dogs.

Poor thing eight miles from home with no friend near, raced by dogs until her tongue hung out, and to save her life rushed into the open door of the Claffin home. Poor Jenny Deer. With four bullet marks on her legs and body and one thru her red blanket, and the damned dogs racing her for life. Poor thing. Poor thing. I can't help it, but these things make me homesick. I'm ashamed of myself, Dear Mother, Good Bye.

From your son  
Chauncey.

Madison, Wisconsin, Jan. 6th 1863  
Hd. Quarters 25th Regt. Wisc.

Dear sister:

I am sure you would smile if you could get a view of Co. G. as I can see them from where I sit. You would say, "What a writing school." I can count more than 40 of the boys writing letters to their mothers or their girls. Mostly to their girls. Its easy to tell, if a fellow is writing to his mother he don't squirm and cover his paper when some guy looks over his shoulder. There is a lot of such teasing. The only way is to get away up in the top bunks out of reach and hold their portfolios on their laps for a desk. I came off guard this morning after the coldest night of the winter. My beat was long side the railroad track on a high bank where the wind cut me from all sides. I set my gun down and run back forth to keep from freezing my toes. The snow sifted in the path and kept it softly and mealy. The Legislature had some extra work at the capitol last night. I could see the light at the top of the dome until after midnight.

No pay yet though they keep promising it. Went to the Episcopal church last Sunday. Say, don't they put on style though? I compared them in my mind to our little bunch in that two by four schoolhouse in Gilmanton. The preacher came out in a black dress and talked about things I couldn't understand, but the music was nice when I came away. If I was any better in heart, it was because of the music and not for anything the preacher said. A lot of the boys celebrated Christmas and New Year to their sorrow. Some of them were put in jail up town and two of them are there yet. Nearly every other house between here and the Capitol sells beer and by the time the lovers of grog get into town they are full to running over with "When Johnny comes marching home." There was close to a mutiny of the two regiments here the other day because so many of the boys had been arrested and jailed in the city. The 30th. regiment and several companies of the 25th came out without officers, formed in ranks swearing they would go up and storm the city of Madison, if necessary, and release their comrades in jail. Feeling ran so high that I took my place in the ranks without much heart in it to tell the truth. I was glad when our officers came around and explained that we were mutineers and in violation of the rules of war and that we should disband.

I had not pity in my heart for the fellows in jail and I was glad for an excuse to sneak back to headquarters. We have some good fellows in our company who are devils when they are in drink. And we have about four who are devils drunk or sober. While I am writing these, the boys are singing Dixie in great chorus. This awful weather makes us hanker for the warmer south and, since there is no hope of home. All seems quiet on the Potomac.

I see by the papers that the churches are urged to pray for the end of the war. They have had several spells at this and the battles have been harder and the slaughter greater. The churches south have been doing the same thing. It would seem that God ought to pity the slave and help our side, but will he? I know what father would say. He would quote Napoleon, who said, "Put your trust in well drilled troops and keep your powder dry." I remember last time I heard him say this, when Elder Morse was visiting us and they were talking about the wickedness of slavery about which they both agreed. Father disputed the Elder's opinion that God presided over the movements and affairs of earth. He cited slavery and the wicked wars of the earth and the crimes of the liquor traffic as being inconsistent with the character of a just God. Elder Morse agreed with father this far, that they were not in harmony with the Divine plan, but were tolerated for some reason not given to man to know.

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Have father tell Elder Morse, I thank him for his kind words, His son Henry is about and able to eat his rations every day. I hope you wont sell your land as you talk of doing. I got a letter from G----- the other day and answered it. He thinks McClellan is a traitor. Lots of us think the same. Our Captain is a wise man and he says McClellan has been waiting and waiting when he should have been marching and fighting. I am awfully sorry that Fremont was set down on by Lincoln. I am with Fremont as many of the boys are. I have no heart in this war if the slaves cannot go free. Fremont wanted to set them free as fast as we came to them. I am disappointed in Lincoln. I remember a talk father had with Uncle Ed. Cartwright, who was blaming the war on the Abolitionists. It made father mad and he talked back pretty hot. He said I have a boy who wants to go to war and I would give his life cheerfully as Abraham offered his son if necessary that the slaves might be freed. Father meant all right though it seemed hard, but I love him all the more for it, although I suppose I am the boy he meant for the sacrifice. We are all anxious to go south, though none of us that I know are anxious to get shot for any cause. Direct as before to Camp Randall. Love to all mother, father and brothers.

Your brother,  
Chauncey

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Dear Mother:

This is a fine morning and the 29th. of January, 1863. How the time flies. Your last letter came day before yesterday. I am awfully glad father had such good luck killing deer. You will have plenty of good meat for the winter. You wish I could have a taste along with you. You bet I do too, but it can't be, so we must not think of it. We came close to a row with the 30th regiment yesterday. The Colonel in command of a squad came down to put some of our boys in the guard house. The word spread like wild fire and a rush was made for the barracks where the boys were taken, and it took but a minute to get them from the 30th men and the 30th Colonel was glad to get back to his regiment. The boys are threatening revolt against the commissary. Our meat and bread is a fright and a big share of the men in both regiments are ripe for mischief. I get a lunch nearly every day at a little grocery just outside the fence. I get a glass of cider, a handful of crackers and a nice piece of Swiss cheese for ten cents. They are Swiss Germans that run the grocery and the girl that clerks has the blackest hair and eyes I ever saw. She has been in this country three years and talks very good English. She has a brother in the Swiss army and when she brags the Swiss soldiers and how much nicer they are than we Yankees, she shows the prettiest white teeth as she smiles.

There is a rumor that we are to be paid soon, anyway before we go South. Rumor is such a liar we don't know what to believe. It is quite sure we will be assigned to the Southwest somewhere. Perhaps to Vicksburg, where the rebs are making a grand stand, perhaps to post duty on some of the river points. Some of the boys pretend they would like to smell gun powder on the battle line before the war ends. I suppose they feel that way. I am learning some things. I find that men who talk the most are not always the bravest.

The news from Washington is bad. McClellan with his big army has gone into winter quarters instead of making an aggressive campaign toward Richmond. Gen. McClernand is doing far more good work than all the rest. Some of the boys are dreaming of home and a good time pretty soon, but the Richmond papers talk like the south was just beginning to wake up. Lots of poor fellows will bite the dust before the end yet.

Friday Jan. 30th. I took a run this morning up to the Adjutants office and back, to try my wind. It is quite a distance from our barrack. I believe I am getting my legs and wind back, and I am awfully glad. Some of the poor fellows who were sick with me in St. Cloud, Minn., with measles are losing ground. Orlando Adams of Mondovi says he has no wind anymore. Nathan Mann says he has no vim any more and can't stand the drill exercise.

Lots of the boys are blue as whet stones. They say if they were only out of it, the Union might go to blazes. If they would take us where the traitors are, and give us a chance to fight, we would feel that we were doing something. But this dreadful sameness is wearing.

Februrary 2nd.

Dear mother:

Your latest letter came this morning. I hope you won't delay writing because news is scarce. Anything from home is news if it is in your hand writing and only about the dog or cat. No, I don't suppose we get the war news earlier than you do. I thank you for sending the paper of tea, altho you remember I don't love it especially. But I am sure this will be good coming from the best of mothers. I will drink it in memory of you and home. I have read it somewhere that mothers were the best beings in the world and now I know it to be true. I trust I may live to come home and prove it to you. You think our officers should see that our bread and meat is good. My dear mother, they don't have a word to say about it. It's in the hands of the contractors. Don't worry, we will live thru it. and if the southern bullets don't get us, we will tell you all about it when we come home. So Henry Amidon is married. Well, well, Henry is a good boy and I hope he has made no mistake in his choice. So the world goes. I used to think Mrs. Amidon's doughnuts and milk gravy was better than ours. You don't care mother do you if I say this. She was a nice cook and after walking down to Beef river, and taking a swim with Henry, and by the time we got back to his home for a late dinner, things tasted mighty good.

I was just a bit of a fool two years ago next March when I tried to wade across the foot bridge up to my chin in ice water near the mill dam to visit Henry when his folks were in Vermont. I had to back out and when I got back to shore I was so numb that I ran clear down to Uncle Dan Loomis' place and back to start my blood circulating. I was so cold I couldn't put all my clothes on and ran half naked.

I guess I've strung this letter plenty long, and part of it I can't read myself. I expect to catch it from father about spelling as usual, well that's alright, I ought to improve as I bo't me a pocket dictionary. It looks so much like a testament that our Chaplain came along the other day and asked me what chapter I was reading. Well he said, the testament is the only book that is better anyway. He is a good man and wants every soldier to have a testament.

Direct as before to Co. G Camp Randall, Madison.

Your son,  
Chauncey