

Barrington remembered the Maine...from afar

By BARBARA BENSON

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the 16th in a series based on the letters of Emaline Hawley Brown and her daughter, Hattie Brown Porter, written mostly from the Octagon House on Barrington's West Main St. between 1889 and 1904.

On Jan. 25, 1898, in response to several years of Cuban insurgency, and inflamed relations with Spain, the United States battleship Maine entered Havana harbor. On Feb. 15, an enormous explosion destroyed the ship and killed 260 of its crew. Charges and counter-charges as to whether it was an externally planted explosion, or an internal one, added to the growing war hysteria. "Remember the Maine" has become a classic declamation of history. On the 22nd of April, 1898, Congress passed the Volunteer Army Act, and authorized the organization of a first volunteer cavalry or "Rough Riders." Theodore Roosevelt became their Lieutenant Colonel under the command of Colonel Leonard Wood. On April 24, Spain declared war on the United States.

Emaline gave some idea of the patriotic appeal which years of frustrating experiences with Spain brought to this war. On April 29, she wrote to Laura:

"I had a letter from Meal (her sister Amelia Colby—living in Chicago) saying that Sull Colby's boy had gone to the war as bugler, and Warren Purdy's youngest boy had gone as ensign and his oldest boy is to start for Klondike next week. Guess Pa won't go he has to stay home and help do housework, am glad I haven't any boys to go, I am so sorry our country has to have another war. I hope it will be of short duration, there seems to be plenty of young men that want to go."

On May 3, 1898, Hattie wrote a long letter to Laura, part of which read,

"Well—its war and housecleaning here. The Wauconda Cannon is booming over war news and I feel to rejoice for I have my bedroom and sitting room settled at last".

This was one of Hattie's rare references to external circumstances other than those which directly affected her day to day life on the Oak Knoll Road farm. Her letters to her sister are detailed chronicles of the chores that filled her life each day, and of the small progressive steps of her son Howard, or the simple accomplishment of completing her bedroom curtains. There were visits to town three miles away, nearly always with a stop to see Ma and Pa at the Octagon House. If serious shopping had to be done, the Browns would babysit for Howard, a fact that Emaline always reported to Laura:

"Howard always stays with me when Hattie goes downtown, he is perfectly contented here and don't care if his ma does go off he has apples and a banana when he comes so he is all right. We intend to keep apples or bananas on hand for him and if he comes when we don't have any grandpa immediately goes downtown after some. The little fellow asks for apples as soon as he can think of after he gets here, you ought to see him put down the bananas he does look for them".

Both Emaline and Hattie wrote "diary letters," which they mailed on a weekly schedule to Laura, occasionally both wrote at the same time, but generally there was discussion about whose turn it was to answer what must have been incredibly long letters from Laura. Sometimes illness was the deciding factor, such as several weeks when Ma's eyes bothered her too

The war with Spain was felt here in Barrington as evidenced in the Octagon House correspondence. The letters, too, give a detailed glimpse at the styles, customs and hardships of daily life at the turn of the century.



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CHILDREN'S AND INFANTS' WEAR

(5.14.1892, p. 393).

Fig. a: baby's long cloak.
Fig. b: baby's wrapper, cap and bib.

Fig. c: baby's frock with guimpe.
Fig. d: frock for girl from 7 to 9 years old.
Fig. e: little boy's jacket.
Fig. f: little girl's jacket.
Fig. g: frock for girl from 1 to 3 years old.
Fig. h: little girl's cloak and bonnet.