

Changes in Advertisements During the Civil War

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The Civil War was a time when uncertainty was high. No one knew what was going to happen to them. The families that were left behind during the war were uncertain if they were going to be forced out of their house and left with no place to go, or even worse they are left to die. The men were off at war... How would a family survive if they have no income and children to feed or have to pay for a doctor to come to the house and administer medicine for a sickly child? The soldiers had their doubts about whether or not they were going to live through the next battle that they were fighting in and whether or not they were going to be able to survive an injury if one occurred. The men that fought in the war had their doubts and were uncertain if they were even going to make it home to their families. They also had to deal with the fact that they could come home to their entire family being deceased or the family had to move to a new area and they were not able to communicate where they are now living. The communities that were affected during the war were uncertain about whether their town was going to become a battle field or if the towns economic status would drop drastically due to the men fighting in the war. Everyone that was affected during the war was uncertain about a lot. Throughout my research I wanted to know how people and businesses were able to survive during the war. How were the advertisements being advertised? What was the reasoning for why they were advertising new areas of interest. I wanted to make a connection to see why the advertisements were changing over the course of the Civil War. When I was researching, I had to think and put myself in the shoes of a soldier, a wife, a child, etc. to try and get a better understanding of what it was like to go through a great amount of stress that it puts onto a person. People knew that the war was happening, but they did not have TV's, cell phones or a radio to find out what was happening across the United States. Instead they had newspapers. Newspapers was the

common way for people to get information during the week and sometimes even daily. In a newspaper, there are common areas of interest that people look at when they are reading the paper. People look at the stories that are published, international news headlines, the detailed graphics that are within the newspapers and the advertisements. During the time of the Civil War the advertisements were a way for the people to see what businesses were selling. Some were goods while others were services to help the sick or to make remedies. The Civil War advertisements shows a shift in the American psyche which reflects evolving interests, desires, ambitions as well as health issues and medical concerns.

The Civil War advertisements that I researched were from Harper's Weekly. Harper's Weekly was a newspaper that would be given out weekly. Harper's Weekly began running in 1857 as a "journal of civilization". The newspaper started running in 1857 and is still running to this present day. I chose to use Harper's Weekly because I felt that it had quality advertisements that I could use to make comparisons to other advertisements within different issues and years. I decided to only look at the January issues of the Harper's weekly for time sake and for simplicity sake too. In the January issue of *Harper's Weekly* of 1861, the advertisements were geared toward quality of life issues that a man, female, or child could be dealing with. The advertisements that were geared toward illnesses and cures included ads about Throat diseases, Premature Hair Loss, Spasmodic Asthma, Hernia's and much more. The ads also included remedies that doctors had made for certain illnesses. An advertisement for Spasmodic Asthma appeared in the January 5th, 1861 edition of *Harper's Weekly*. This ad's main goal is to sell a product that cures this dreadful illness. The ad includes information about the illness, where the medicine is located, who made the medicine, and how the medicine helps to relieve the pain. The ad helped to advertise its product and how it can help with the uncertainty of this illness. Looking at the other ads throughout the issue there is not much difference in what is being advertised. The illnesses and the cures have a few small ads throughout the weeks of January.

In January's issue of 1862 there were differences in what *Harper's Weekly* was advertising. The January 4, 1862 advertisements

maintained some interest in quality of life issues but started to transition into what was needed in the war. There were advertisements for civilian clothing as well as war related issues such as artificial legs, female weakness, matrimony made easy and much more. The advertisement that stood out the most was the “Matrimony Made Easy” advertisement. This ad talked about how the experiment of sex with a partner will help to fascinate any person that they wish. This ad is very different from the other ads that are in the newspaper. From the Civil War starting, families and couples are being torn apart by the war. Some are being killed, others are away at war for months at a time. The couples cannot experience the love satisfaction that they need or want within their relationship. The ad allows for a man or woman to get information about this ‘curious scientific experiment which never fails’. The later issues during the month of January started to include more items about the war. These advertisements included Infantry tactics, Heavy Artillery, guns, and cartridges, etc. The January issues in 1861-1862, both show a slow change in how the uncertainty of war is starting to effect what the consumers are demanding.

The *Harper's Weekly* advertisements during 1862-1865 changed based on what was needed by the war effort. While the January issue in 1862 still has the illness and cure ads in the newspaper, after looking into the month further, there is an increase in military ads. Going into the year 1863, the newspaper's advertisements in January are offering more advertisements for someone that is fighting in the Civil War. There are ads for American Watches, Swords, Guns, Pistols, Artificial legs, Mess Kettles, etc. There are also ads for ‘Life Pills’. These ads are geared toward a person that is nervous and needs help calming themselves down. There are also ads for Pensions, Bounty, Pay and Prize for all Army and Navy claims that were made. Looking at 1864, the newspaper advertisements are geared even more towards helping with the war effort perhaps because in April of 1863 Congress passed a Conscription Law which drafted men into the Union Army. The January 2, 1864 issue, has more ads about the war and selling items to purchase i.e. Union Playing Cards, watches, and artificial ears. Comparing the ads from the previous years, there is a more significant amount of the ads for the consumer to read. There is three pages worth of advertisements that relate to the war. An advertisement that stood

out the most would be the ads for Bibles. In the January Issues from 1861-1863, there were no ads for a Bible. Starting in 1864 there were ads each week about them. The ad talked about where the consumer could get a Bible and how much it would cost. Advertising about a Bible in that time era was uncommon and reflects the extreme uncertainty the people were experiencing. Due to the war happening, families and people are being tested on their faith and whether or not they can believe that the war will end or it will continue. The usage of a bible can also help the families to find peace and comfort while their husband, brother, son, or a friend is fighting in the war. The ads over these years have changed to reflect what the war effort was demanding.

The January 7, 1865 issue has similar advertisements to the 1862-1864 ads; however they also reflect the transition to a post war society. There was not a lot of ads about guns, warfare, ammunition or trying to sell any products related to the war. There were some ads that were trying to sell useful items that a soldier could use i.e. sweatproof money belt and army badges. Looking at the other ads throughout the month of January, there were more ads about curing illnesses. The ad for “Pineapple Cider” is an ad that will cure Rheumatism (Harper's, 1865). The ad gives directions to on how to use the medicine and what it will do to help cure it. The advertisement that stood out the most out of at the issues in January would be the ad for “PETROLEUM” (Harper's, 1865). The ad talks about how a consumer can buy stock in the Petroleum and Mining Company. It talks about where the company mines the Petroleum and where it is located. This advertisement was not in the other 1861-1864 issues of the *Harper's Weekly*. The trend that was shown throughout 1862-1865 shows that the advertisements were first geared towards the war effort, but also started to gear towards new innovations which would bring their own uncertainties.

The advertisements that were published over the years of the Civil War changed over time. The trend that was noticed was that as the war progressed, the ads started to change to what was needed by the war effort. The Civil War advertisements show a shift in the American psyche which reflects evolving interests, desires, ambitions, as well as health issues and medical concerns. The

advertisements showed changes and trends that were happening during the Civil War. The only certainty that the war brought was uncertainty.

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