

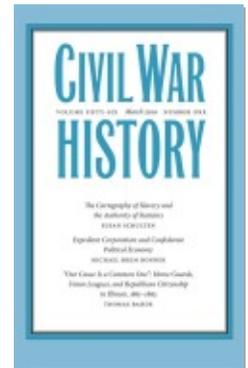


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“Our Cause Is a Common One”: Home Guards, Union Leagues, and Republican Citizenship in Illinois, 1861–1863

THOMAS BAHDE

In August 1861, Cephas Leach, a concerned citizen of Adams County in western Illinois reported to Governor Richard Yates that “affairs here are becoming more complicated” as refugee unionists and southern sympathizers both crossed the border to escape the violence and bloodshed in Missouri. Several of the emigrants were allegedly Confederate guerillas who brought their families into Illinois for safety then returned to Missouri to fight against the Union. Leach worried that “their spies have traversed the country,” and he warned the governor that his county’s prosperity might make it an easy target for plunder, as “this very industry and thrift of the community leave us destitute of arms.” The people were farmers, not fighters, and not sufficiently armed to resist the threat of enemy incursions, leaving their livestock, haylofts, fields, and families vulnerable to an “inroad from the rebels of Missouri.” Leach reported that arms were needed immediately

The title quotation is from Thomas Wilson to Governor Richard Yates, Nov. 15, 1861, Yates Family Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library (hereafter ALPL). The dates of this study fall generally between the Illinois Militia Act of May 1861 and the governor’s call for ten regiments for state service in the spring of 1863. I have not included the “Cairo Expedition” of 1861 because it was composed of volunteer militia companies rather than “home guards” as I employ the term. This article is based on a sample of seventy-eight letters written to Governor Richard Yates on the subject of Copperheads and/or home guards between 1861 and 1863 in the Yates Family Papers and the Governor’s Correspondence at the Illinois State Archives (hereafter ISA). I have retained the original spelling and grammar of the letters.

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and wrote, "If we cannot get them from the state, we must get some for ourselves." He estimated that about fifty firearms were needed: "We suppose we need for Cavalry, or Minnie Rifles (short, 32 inches with a strap) and Minnie Cartridges. A pair of pistols, one smoothbore (to carry buckshot, for use in the night) and one rifled. A Sabre; short and heavy for unskilled hands. Are we right?"¹ If somewhat naïve, Leach and his compatriots in Adams County were also earnest in their desire to defend their homes against what they considered a true threat to the safety of their community.

During the first two years of the war, letters came to Governor Yates from many other concerned citizens across Illinois, warning of imminent civil war within the state and asking for arms, equipment, and advice in order to form independent companies of "home guards." In so doing, they demonstrated an understanding of republican citizenship that harkened back to the Revolution and included the right and obligation to organize in defense of home and hearth. While they intended to form independently, home guard companies also required support from the government in the way of arms, ammunition, and state-vested authority. Combining a sense of republican duty to the state with the desire to protect their communities, home guard companies tied private safety interests inseparably to the public interests of the state: safeguarding one's own family and property became tantamount to safeguarding the state and the Union.²

The connection between republican citizenship, local safety, and pro-Union patriotism became more apparent in 1863 and 1864, as citizens joined the new Union Leagues, where they frequently continued to organize home guard companies. The Union Leaguers who organized themselves into armed companies continued to evoke the same republican images of yeomen farmers organizing, with assistance from the state, in defense of their homes and livelihoods. Understanding both home guards and Union Leagues as grassroots political organizations after a traditional model of popular militia activity suggests a reconsideration of the view that Union Leagues were little more than armed Republican cabals or elite-driven political machines. For ordinary Illinoisans, the root of these organizations was not partisanship

1. C. A. Leach to Governor Richard Yates, Aug. 27, 1861, Yates Family Papers.

2. Scholarship on the role of home guards during the Civil War in Illinois and in every other Union state is virtually nonexistent. For a general overview of the mobilization of northern militia, see Robert S. Chamberlain, "The Northern State Militia," *Civil War History* 4 (June 1958): 105–18, though Chamberlain confuses state militia, volunteer militia, home guards, hundred days regiments, and voluntary companies recruited to enter federal service.

but instead resembled the more profound motives that had long spurred citizens to perform home service: personal and familial safety, protection of economic assets, and the defense of political order in the broadest sense.³

The question of what exactly constituted home service was a live one for Illinoisans in the early 1860s, and their answers reveal a complex and evolving understanding of the relationship of the citizen to the state and federal government. Home service was based on two main precedents: the compulsory federal militia system established by the Militia Act of 1792 and the popular independent voluntary militias of the antebellum era.⁴ By the 1850s, the federal militia system had been in decay in most states for decades, and militia districts that were originally intended to provide a regimental command structure had devolved into bureaucratic tokens of their original intent. Mandatory militia musters and drills went largely unattended and disregarded despite laws that levied fines for nonattendance.

3. For the interpretation of Union Leagues as primarily political organizations, see especially chapter 2 in Frank L. Klement, *Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1984). See also Bruce Grant, *Fight for a City: The Story of the Union League Club of Chicago and Its Times, 1880–1955* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1955). Recent work also neglects the grassroots Union Leagues in favor of the larger and more centralized organizations, including Adam I. P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006); Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005); Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2002), and Lawson, “‘A Profound National Devotion’: The Civil War Union Leagues and the Construction of a New National Patriotism,” *Civil War History* 48 (2002): 338–62. Joseph Allan Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1998), 184–85, briefly mentions both Union Leagues and home guards in Illinois but fails to connect the two.

4. Nineteenth-century Americans used the terms “militia,” “volunteers,” and “home guards” interchangeably. For a cogent discussion of the different terms, see Eleanor L. Hannah, *Manhood, Citizenship, and the National Guard Illinois, 1870–1917* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2007). See also recent scholarship on the antebellum militia, including Saul Cornell, *A Well-Regulated Militia: The Founding Fathers and the Origins of Gun Control in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006); Mary Ellen Rowe, *Bulwark of the Republic: The American Militia in the Antebellum West* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003); H. Richard Uviller and William G. Merkel, *The Militia and the Right to Arms; or, How the Second Amendment Fell Silent* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2002); and Jerry Cooper, *The Rise of the National Guard: The Evolution of the American Militia, 1865–1920* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1997). For a more problematic set of definitions, see John K. Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, Macmillan Wars of the United States series (New York: Macmillan, 1983); Jim Dan Hill, *The Minute Man in Peace and War: A History of the National Guard* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Stackpole, 1964); and William H. Riker, *Soldiers of the States: The Role of the National Guard in American Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1957).

Voluntary militias, on the other hand, were more like military fraternal orders or social clubs and were extremely popular in the decade preceding the Civil War. They frequently received state arms and equipment and were even authorized to act as militia on behalf of the state but remained independent of the state's formal militia command structure. Although military historians have highlighted the ineffectiveness of these prewar voluntary companies, with their gaudy uniforms and lack of practical training, the rage for pseudo-military service in voluntary militias during the late 1850s provided not only a sizeable pool of early recruits for the federal service but also a readymade model through which potential volunteers could prepare themselves for military service in the early months of the war.⁵

There was also a third and perhaps more nebulous concept of home service that most adult Illinoisans would have inherited from their fathers and grandfathers who had fought in the Revolution or the War of 1812. The "minuteman," turning out from his comfortable home with musket in hand to defend his family and his nation, was a valuable republican symbol that placed the military power of the nation literally within the hands of the citizens rather than a centralized government. Although actual minutemen had, in fact, performed poorly as a combat force in both the Revolution and the War of 1812, the notion of the citizen-soldier in its purest form proved an irresistible patriotic image to both Whigs and Democrats from the 1820s through the 1850s, even as the militia system itself fell into disuse.⁶ By the

5. For antebellum volunteer militias as peacekeepers, see Cooper, *Rise of the National Guard*, 16–18; and Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 85. Mahon estimates that 40 percent of the initial 93,000 "militiamen" who answered Lincoln's call for volunteers in April 1861 were members of antebellum volunteer militias (98), but Cooper believes that "the development of the uniformed militia during the preceding two decades contributed only minimally to the Civil War mobilization" (20).

6. In Illinois, the 1827 Winnebago War and the 1832 Black Hawk War were among the few conflicts in which the regular state militia took part. Abraham Lincoln recalled that he was "elated" during his brief campaign in the Black Hawk War and that being elected captain of a volunteer company "gave me more pleasure than any I have had since." *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 3 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1953), 512. Erastus Beadle's popular historical dime novels, first published in 1860, drew on the romance of the independent armed citizen as an American type. See Albert Johannsen, *The House of Beadle and Adams and Its Dime and Nickel Novels: The Story of a Vanished Literature*, 3 vols. (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1950–62). For the popularity of the citizen-soldier ideal, see Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers*; Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1979); Peter Karsten, *Patriot-Heroes in England and America: Political Symbolism and Changing Values over Three Centuries* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978); and Jeffrey



Left: "Home Guard." Detail of patriotic stationery. Collection of the New-York Historical Society. Right: "Costume suggested for the Brave STAY-AT-HOME 'LIGHT GUARD,'" *Harper's Weekly*, September 7, 1861.

early 1860s, the lines between these different concepts of home service blurred for most Americans, and the idea of the militia or the home guard likely evoked, to some degree, all of these things.

Popular militia activity, in a broad sense, composed a part of antebellum Americans' repertoire for dealing with emergencies, and when war threatened in 1860, all of its forms were mobilized to meet the crisis. Along with service in state-level volunteer regiments, this complex and somewhat ambiguous set of ideas about home service was manifested in the formation of home guard companies. As companies of concerned citizens, home guards were motivated by threats to themselves, their families, their property, the state, and the Union. Most home guard companies were never formally recognized as a military force, were not mustered-in to any volunteer regiments, and frequently did not even receive the assistance they sought from the state. But in perceiving and reacting to the dangers they supposed were

Kosiorek, "Revolutionary Commemoration, Liberty, and Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century America" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Southern California, 2006).

around them, and by carefully crafting their appeals for state assistance, home guard companies provided a model of wartime patriotic military participation that has been neglected in the history of the Union war effort.⁷

Part of the reason for this neglect was many nineteenth-century Americans' negative perceptions of home service. From the beginning of the war, the northern popular press ridiculed the idea of the home guard. The vaunted ideal of the citizen-soldier was applied to the volunteers who enlisted in federally mustered regiments but not to those who wished or needed to stay at home. As Earl Hess has observed, "Northerners readily concluded that avoidance of service was explained by selfishness."⁸ Home guards were portrayed as selfish, lazy, and feminine for their desire to remain at home rather than march off to war. Popular images of home guards included depictions of broom-handle brigades, effeminate men cradled in their wives' arms, and other feminized images.⁹

In Illinois, few of the county histories published during the 1870s and 1880s memorialized those who had remained at home and joined local guard companies. A popular song from the 1870s entitled "The Home Guards" encapsulated the scorn many returned veterans felt for the "stay-at-homes":

7. This is most true in the North, where the model of volunteer service on behalf of the federal government quickly became the accepted norm. Although it is an excellent regimental social history, Dennis W. Brandt's *From Home Guards to Heroes: The 87th Pennsylvania and Its Civil War Community* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2006) perpetuates this, and does not, despite its title, discuss home guards. In the Confederacy and the border states, home guards took a more active role not only in home defense but in actual combat. For this reason among others the southern and border state home guard experience was substantially different from the northern. For discussions of the role of southern and border state home guards, see Scott A. Porter, "Bashi-Bazooks' and Rebels Too: Action at Camden Point, July 13, 1864," *Missouri Historical Review* 101.2 (2007): 99–114; Steven H. Newton, "The Confederate Home Guard: Forgotten Soldiers of the Lost Cause?" *North and South* 6.1 (2002): 40–50; Bruce Tap, "Union Men to the Polls, and Rebels to Their Holes: The Contested Election Between John P. Bruce and Benjamin F. Loan, 1862," *Civil War History* 46.1 (2000): 24–40; Mary E. Johnson and Joe Gieger Jr., "West Virginia's Militia and Home Guard in the Civil War," *West Virginia History* 58 (1999–2000): 68–167; Charles G. Williams, "The Confederate Home Guard in Southwest Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 49.2 (1990): 168–72; James A. Hamilton, "The Enrolled Missouri Militia: Its Creation and Controversial History," *Missouri Historical Review* 69.4 (1975): 413–32; and Howard V. Canan, "The Missouri Paw Paw Militia of 1863–1864," *Missouri Historical Review* 62.4 (1968): 431–48.

8. Earl J. Hess, *Liberty, Virtue, and Progress: Northerners and Their War for the Union* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1988), 57.

9. In addition to the images included here, see the cartoon in the upper right corner of page 560 in *Harper's Weekly*, Aug. 31, 1861.

We're the Invincibles of Skanyunk;
 And we stay at home and show our spunk;
 Yes I know that is so;
 And from the table never run away;
 But skedaddle quick when we're asked to pay.
 Refrain: For we're the home guard, Stay at home squad
 And on parades, so brave and bold.¹⁰

The ubiquity of this stereotype and the relative paucity of accurate primary source material on home guards have contributed to the perpetuation of the wartime and postwar negative perceptions by allowing them to continue to speak for the home guard experience. However, the motives of Illinoisans who wished to remain at home were a good deal more complex than either cowardice or selfishness. By allowing home guards themselves to speak of their priorities and motivations, we can gain significant insight into not only the experience of the home front but also the complex wartime relationship between the citizen and the state.

Loyal Illinoisans who wished to form home guard companies did so to meet a perceived threat from local "secesh" or Copperhead elements within their communities who, concerned unionists believed, were organizing their own companies and planning insurrection against the state and federal governments. Although the level of conflict in Illinois did not reach anything near the violence in states like Missouri or Kentucky, the Prairie State's experience during the Civil War came closer to the experience of the border states than to the Yankee Northeast. In the lower Midwest, the stakes of civil war were especially high, as the possibility of further disunion in the region seemed to loom particularly large. As one Quincy preacher described the urgency of the situation, "the present struggle is one in which every Christian must rise from his knees and shoulder his rifle."¹¹

Although Illinois sent more than 250,000 volunteer soldiers into the Union army to fight in both the eastern and western theaters, the home front they left behind was not united in supporting them. Union general and later governor John M. Palmer admitted after the war, "I did not myself

10. "The Home Guards," words by Col. J. Franklin Warner, music by P. W. Turnbull (New York: J. F. Warner, 1879).

11. Quoted in David Costigan, "A City in Wartime: Quincy, Illinois, and the Civil War," (Ph.D. diss., Illinois State Univ., 1994), 29.

feel the greatest confidence in the ultimate success of our intended efforts to suppress the rebellion. The indifference of many and hostility of some of my acquaintances made me apprehensive that, before the struggle would end, even Illinois might be the theater of civil conflict.”¹² The departure of thousands of patriotic young men by the fall of 1861 seemed only to heighten this sense of apprehension, as their absence left the state’s pro-Union population depleted.

Although historians have typically expressed the lack of consensus within Illinois as a political struggle between Democrats and Republicans, the extent of the division reached deeply into many communities, where local animosities and tensions moved the tenor of the conflict beyond mere political rhetoric. As Michael Fellman has observed of Civil War Missouri, “the horror of guerilla war lay in part in its turning a normally disputatious rural society, filled with verbal abuse, occasional physical fights, and endless law suits, into the locale of war of all against all.”¹³ Rural Illinoisans were just as disputatious as their counterparts in Missouri, and the threat of total war seemed no less immediate. Pro-southern or antiwar groups frequently harassed pro-Union and pro-war citizens with vigilante violence and intimidation, and the urgency with which many unionists suggested forming companies of home guards attests to an ideological division that went well beyond the ballot box.

As patriotic Illinoisans described the threats looming on their borders and within the conclaves of home-grown “secesh,” the crisis of local war seemed imminent. Many felt that they were on the front lines of a second civil war that threatened not only the ideological fabric of the Union and the state, but their very lives as well. Given the uncertain political climate of the 1850s and early 1860s, the close proximity to unsettled Missouri and Kentucky, and the avowed pro-southern sympathies of a large portion of the state, it was by no means certain that Illinois’ borders would not be breached or that a home-grown rebellion would not break out in the heart of the Prairie State.

Since Frank Klement’s path-breaking work on Copperheads and secret societies, scholarship on the threat of disunion or treason—especially in the Midwest—has fallen in line with his convincing thesis that exaggerated claims of an organized Copperhead threat served Republican political aims

12. John M. Palmer, *Personal Recollections of John M. Palmer: The Story of an Earnest Life* (Cincinnati: R. Clarke, 1901), 281.

13. Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 38.

during the elections of 1862 and 1864. While Klement acknowledged that secret societies like the Knights of the Golden Circle, the Order of American Knights, and Sons of Liberty did exist, he made a point of determining that they were never the threat Republicans made them out to be. In an early article on Copperhead secret societies in Illinois, Klement stated baldly that “the subversive society bogey-man was a political apparition intended solely to aid Republicans in defeating Democrats at the polls.”¹⁴

Klement’s revisionist theses have largely withstood the test of time, and many of his core interpretations still seem to ring true, but recent scholarship has begun to challenge some of his assumptions or, rather, the extent to which he carried them.¹⁵ Republican governors like Richard Yates certainly exaggerated the threat of disunion to serve political purposes, but fears of a rebellion in the Old Northwest did not come only from politicians, nor were they mobilized only for political purposes. Klement rightly warned against taking the claims of Republican politicians, party organs, and government agents at face value, but too zealously applying his thesis overlooks the very real perception among many ordinary midwesterners that civil war within the region and invasion by Rebel forces were distinct possibilities. When Illinoisans wrote to Governor Yates, they perceived real unrest in their communities and wrote earnestly to inform the governor that treason and disloyalty “stalk abroad at noon day.”¹⁶ Their letters, sent from across the state, focused most urgently on the threats they perceived around them, not political affiliations, and worried that they would be unable to meet these threats without some help from the government.¹⁷

14. Frank Klement, “Copperhead Secret Societies in Illinois During the Civil War,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 48 (1955): 186. See also Klement, *Dark Lanterns and The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960). Klement was responding to the popular view that the Copperhead secret societies were ideologically unified, politically powerful, and openly rebellious treasonous organizations. For this view, see Wood Gray, *The Hidden Civil War: The Story of the Copperheads* (New York: Viking, 1942).

15. Jennifer Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006); Joan E. Cashin, “Deserters, Civilians, and Draft Resistance in the North,” in *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed. Joan E. Cashin (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), 262–85; and Robert Churchill, “Liberty, Conscription, and Delusions of Grandeur: The Sons of Liberty Conspiracy of 1863–1864,” *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives* 30.4 (1998): 295–303.

16. Cyrus Gifford to Richard Yates, Feb. 10, 1863, Governor’s Correspondence, ISA.

17. I make no attempt to judge the veracity of the writers’ claims, only to demonstrate that their concerns were earnestly expressed, and that the perceived threats were, to them, at least, quite serious.

Although loyal Illinoisans were not always sure exactly what the disloyal elements in their midst were planning, they frequently referenced the guerilla warfare in Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee as a warning against what might become of Illinois. From Adams County, on the border with Missouri, Joseph Artus warned Governor Yates, “War exists, a Rebelious war with all its horrors . . . exactly and as our Sister state across the river.” In southern Illinois, a unionist refugee from Tennessee warned: “My honest opinion is that if Cairo should be attached they will turn out in open rebellion without some immediate course is taken to prevent or counteract their mighty influence in this and the adjoining counties.” An anonymous writer from Marion County, who signed his letter “Union Forever,” wrote that local “Secesh” had hatched a plan to “infest the Southern part of this state with guirillas the same as Missouri.” A refugee from that state warned similarly: “I am acquainted with the signs of treasonable movement that indicate approaching trouble. . . . The friends of the South are bold in their threats and everything indicates that civil war is almost upon us. . . . They expect civil war and say that this state will be the same or worse than Missouri.”¹⁸ Although the warnings were vague and the threats often exaggerated, the perception that Illinois could become—if it had not already—another zone of guerilla warfare motivated many local Illinoisans to prepare themselves to defend their homes.

When writers to Governor Yates could more specifically describe the threats they faced in their local areas, they frequently cited organized and armed companies of draft resisters, “secesh,” guerillas, and other “rough” elements in their communities, as well as secret societies like the Knights of the Golden Circle. Drawing a connection between local troublemakers and well-publicized groups like the Knights helped worried citizens link troubles in their own communities to suspicions of a broader conspiracy. Although they had likely first heard of the Knights through wild rumors culled from Republican newspapers, the sour news they reported to Yates came from their own communities, perpetrated by local individuals. From Marion County, J. M. Galbraith grouped together “Traitors, Rebels, counterfeitors, and hog thieves” and reported to Yates that “I am creditably informed that they are organizing lodges of the famous organization known as the Knights of the Golden Circle.” Near the Missouri border, A. B. Cherry warned Yates: “There

18. Joseph Artus to Richard Yates, Nov. 23, 1861, Adam Earhart to Richard Yates, Aug. 12, 1861, “Union Forever” to Richard Yates, Aug. 25, 1862, James Brewster to Richard Yates, Mar. 6, 1863, all in Yates Family Papers.

is a great number that are armed and headed by desperate men of the county . . . but principally by Refugees vagabonds Bushwhackers from Missouri that will inside of 3 months certainly precipitate a large portion of this county into an armed struggle.” A writer from Wayne County reported that gathered nearby were “some 400 men of the Nights of the Golden Circle declaring their determination to resist the laws of the country” and who were “an incurraiment to the southern rebels there cannot be a doubt.” From Perry County, Lewis Hammach informed Yates that “there is a secret organization in this and adjoining counties . . . they number about 1300 in Franklin and 900 in Washington Co. . . . It is said that the members . . . openly avow their intention to resist a draft or the payment of taxes to defray the expense of this war they are drilling of evening and nights in the northeast part of this county.” Similarly, from Coles County came the report that “there is at this time four Military Companies organized within the limits of this County, with the avowed purpose and intention of resisting the draft. . . . In addition to this there is one company of Guerillas organized near town, whose object is to rob and plunder Union citizens.” A writer who was afraid to sign his name wrote from Effingham County that the “nights of the golden circles” were planning to blow up trains and “fly through the contry and destroy and murder the union men or abolition as they call them I must inform you that they muster and drill every moon bigh night. . . . Something must be done and soon and I say for god sake do something consuring this for the time is short.”¹⁹ Almost all home guard petitioners wrote to Yates of an armed and organized secessionist or disloyal presence in their counties, and whether or not these companies were linked directly to organizations like the Knights of the Golden Circle, for those who wrote to Yates of imminent civil war the necessity for similar organizations of loyal citizens seemed all too apparent.

With reports of approaching calamity pouring in from all over the state and all of Illinois’s volunteer regiments already pledged to the federal service, all that Governor Yates could say to his petitioners was that he believed “the organization of a Home Guard would be highly beneficial.”²⁰ Many of those who wrote to Yates concerning the threat of Copperheads and “secesh” trai-

19. J. M. Galbraith to Richard Yates, Aug. 24, 1861, A. B. Cherry to Richard Yates, June 30, 1863, J. S. Warmoth to Richard Yates, Oct. 30, 1861, Lewis Hammach to Richard Yates, Aug. 20, 1861, M. C. McLain to Richard Yates, July 24, 1863, Unsigned to Richard Yates, Aug. 18, 1862, all in Yates Family Papers.

20. Richard Yates to [illeg.] Leavenworth, Aug. 14, 1861, Yates Family Papers, Letterpress Book BV 5.

tors suggested the very same as a solution to the impending crisis and urgently asked the state for help. "We are now ready to form ourselves into a home guard," wrote C. A. Fox of Peoria County: "we have some traitors among us and we wish to [be] prepared to deal with them according to righteousness." Others wrote that their lives and livelihoods would be endangered unless they received arms and formed companies to protect themselves. J. S. Herod from Hardin County pleaded with Yates: "We wish arms to protect our families and property . . . there is scarcely a week passes but the citizens are alarmed and keep up all night expecting the rebels on us without arms to defend ourselves." Another writer informed Yates that the purpose of his proposed home guard company was "drilling also to protect our selves against mobs riots etc." Thomas Nicholson of Vermillion County suggested a company for "defense and protection of persons and property in this part of the state (and other parts when called for) as emergencies may require."²¹

The urgency of the situation was precipitated by the fact that their local opponents, the "secesh" or Copperhead elements, had already formed such organizations. With armed companies and bands of draft resisters, guerillas, and other dangerous sorts seeming to come and go as they pleased, interrupting pro-Union meetings, and harassing loyal citizens, organizing home guard companies for self-protection seemed not only sensible but necessary. For concerned citizens, it was not a question of whether such companies should be formed but how it should be done, and for this they readily acknowledged that they needed help from the state government.

The process of forming, arming, and mobilizing home guard companies could be confused and confusing. Because Illinoisans, like other Americans, used terms like "home guard" and "militia" virtually interchangeably and frequently had inconsistent understandings of each term, it can be difficult to parse out exactly what they intended by forming such companies. Especially in the early months of the war, when every local aspirant to martial glory was engaged in recruiting or drilling a company of volunteers, it could be hard to distinguish home guard companies from those being recruited for the federal service. For instance, during the first call for volunteers in the spring of 1861, at a meeting of the Sixth Ward Home Guard in Quincy, members were "invited to join an infantry company for active State or National service," and many

21. C. A. Fox to Richard Yates, Sept. 8, 1861, S. Herod to Richard Yates, Jan. 10, 1862, Bryant Higgins to Richard Yates, July 23, 1863, Thomas Nicholson to Richard Yates, July 27, 1863, all in Yates Family Papers.

other early home guard companies followed suit, eventually joining regular volunteer regiments.²²

Between the filling of the first Illinois regiments in spring 1861 and the second call for volunteers in summer 1862, many home guard companies were organized simply to hold themselves in readiness for another general enlistment call. Young men who missed enlisting in the first regiments wanted to practice drilling and marching and to feel like a part of the great military mobilization, so they joined temporary companies to act as a kind of voluntary reserve. These early home guard companies also often acted as informal recruiting companies and their members joined the federal service as soon as they were able.²³

Other early companies were more avowedly local in character and intended only to serve as a home protection force. In Bureau County at the outbreak of the war, two local organizers “at once commenced to form companies for home service.” Among other measures, they established a makeshift armory at Princeton and issued a call for all citizens with guns “to bring them to town Saturday next, where a competent person will take charge of them, and who will see they are kept in proper order for an emergency.” The purpose of this mobilization was “to watch suspicious characters skulking about the county” and to guard the state against a Rebel incursion, for “if the war continues with success on the part of the rebels Illinois will be the great battle ground and it behooves us to be ready for the worst.” On July 4, 1861, a mass gathering of Bureau County home guard companies included fourteen units with names like “Bureau County Tigers,” “Heaton’s Point

22. “A meeting . . .,” *Quincy Daily Whig and Republican*, May 13, 1861. For early home guard companies that joined the federal service, see also reports on the company of S. M. Hayes in the *Pittsfield Pike County Democrat*, Apr. 25, May 1, and May 16, 1861. Preexisting independent or civil militias also functioned as home guards in addition to contributing a substantial number of men to the federal service, see George N. Vourlojianis, *The Cleveland Grays: An Urban Military Company, 1837–1919* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 2002). For the northern military mobilization, see Scott Reynolds Nelson and Carol Sheriff, *A People at War: Civilians and Soldiers in America’s Civil War, 1854–1877* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007) and J. Matthew Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War: The Home Front* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994).

23. For example, after Lincoln’s initial call for volunteers in 1861, Francis Moore of Quincy, Adams County, who belonged to a voluntary prewar cavalry militia company, joined a provisional company of volunteers to await a call for federally mustered cavalry. Members of his company drilled and uniformed themselves as home guards for several weeks until they joined the federal service in August 1861. See F. T. Moore Papers, San Diego State Univ., Special Collections and Univ. Archives.

Home Guards,” “North Prairie Dragoons,” and “Princeton Cadets.” As a later history of the county somewhat dramatically remembered them, these men prepared for the possibility of calamitous local warfare by “invoking the protection of heaven, greased up the old match-locks that had lain among the rubbish for years and years, and grimly looked fate in the face.”²⁴

With enthusiasm for home protection so high, most home guard petitioners already had companies formed by the time they wrote to Governor Yates for arms, equipment, and authority, and their descriptions of them provide some insight into who joined home guard companies and why. Those who organized or joined home guard companies were a diverse group of former soldiers, businessmen, local officials, farmers, and those too old, too young, or otherwise unsuited for regular military service. The reasons that motivated their interest in home service were as diverse as they were. C. A. Fox informed Yates, “Most of our young men have volunteered and have left us” but “many of us who are left wish to prepare our selves that in case of invasion from a rebel forse or any other extreem case we might be able to render officient service to our country.” Similarly, Thomas Wilson of Clay County wrote to Yates that his company of sixty-two men “with few exceptions have families, and cannot well leve them for any considerable length of time, nor do not consider it prudent either to leve this portion of the country so nearly destitute of men as we have already sent in to the army a goodly number of men from this town and vicinity.” However, wrote Wilson, all of his men were eager to perform what duty they could as “lovers of our Old Flag and the Union.” A concerned citizen in Clay County described a local company of “some thirty good Loyal citizens” whose circumstances were such that “by not being able bodied and otherwise prevented, they can not go into the regular Army” but were “anxious to do all they can in defense of our good Government.”²⁵ Home guard petitioners wanted Yates to know that there were patriotic Illinoisans left at home who were eager to do their part in the protection of the state and the preservation of the Union but were simply not able to enter the regular military.

Because home guard companies were often informally recruited and or-

24. H. C. Bradsby, ed., *History of Bureau County, Illinois* (Chicago: World, 1885), 345–47. This memorialization of home guard service is unique among similar county histories published during the 1870s–1920s, which tend to focus exclusively on the contribution of volunteer regiments in the federal service and/or home front activities like sanitary fairs and fundraisers.

25. C. A. Fox to Richard Yates, Sept. 8, 1861, Thomas Wilson to Richard Yates, Nov. 15, 1861, E. Foster to Richard Yates, July 20, 1863, all in Yates Family Papers.

ganized, it is difficult to determine exactly who joined them. Many volunteer companies did file their muster rolls with the adjutant general's office, but these typically also later enlisted in the regular service. The great majority of the home guard companies that were formed in Illinois solely as local home defense organizations probably did not submit their rosters because they worried that this would subject them to an official enrollment as state volunteers. However, by looking at the individuals who wrote to Yates asking for permission to form home guard companies, as well as the surviving roster of one such company, it is possible to form a general picture of the home guard volunteer.

Of sixty-four writers who identified themselves as captains, officers, or spokesmen for their local home guard companies, twenty-nine could be reliably identified in the federal census of 1860. As a group, they were older than the typical age of enlistment, with an average age of thirty-seven, and nearly half were forty or older. They were typically professionals, farmers, or artisans who were well-established in their chosen professions. Among them were nine farmers with an average individual worth of more than \$3,500 and four merchants with an average individual worth of \$7,450. There were also two lawyers, two physicians, two millers, a druggist, a judge, a sheriff, a clergyman, a shoemaker, a confectioner, a station agent, and a medical student. As well as being economically successful, they were also typically the heads of large families. Thirteen had families of more than three children, and only five were unmarried or without children.²⁶

The roster of Bryant Higgins's "independent company of light infantry" from Olney, Richland County reveals a similar demographic among those who joined home guard companies. Of the eighty-three names on the roster, twenty-seven can be reliably identified in the 1860 census. The average age in Higgins's company was thirty-two, which was skewed somewhat by fifteen-

26. Manuscript federal census for 1860; sample from Yates Family Papers. It should be noted that the relatively small number of confirmed matches in the federal census is likely to be the result of several factors, including gross misspelling of names on both the letters and in the census, which makes reliable verification difficult, undercounting in rural areas, and other problems with reliable enumeration. Because of the small data set, the data provided here is meant to be suggestive, rather than conclusive. For reviews of problems with the nineteenth-century census as a historical source, see Miriam L. King and Diana L. Magnuson, "Perspectives on Historical U.S. Census Undercounts," *Social Science History* 19.4 (1995): 455-66; Kenneth Winkle, "The United States Census and Community History," *History Teacher* 28.1 (1994): 87-101; Richard H. Steckel, "The Quality of Census Data for Historical Inquiry: A Research Agenda," *Social Science History* 15.4 (1991): 579-99.

year-old Clarence Harris, who worked as a hotel clerk in Olney. For the most part, Higgins's volunteers were also economically well-established in their community. There were five farmers with an average individual worth of almost \$3,000 and one local merchant worth \$27,000. There were also many well-established artisans in the company, including a saddle maker worth \$1,500, a baker and confectioner worth \$1,400, and an ambrotypist worth \$1,200. There were also a hotel owner, a marble cutter, a dealer in agricultural equipment, a college teacher, and an attorney, among others, on Higgins's roster. The members of Higgins's company were also typically family men: seven had three or more children, sixteen had at least one child, most were married, and only five were listed without any family at all.²⁷

Although these numbers provide an incomplete picture of the sort of men likely to form or join home guard companies, it does suggest a few general contours. Those who fell between eighteen and thirty years of age may have been prevented from entering the federal service by family and economic obligations, as many owned significant personal wealth, headed large families, or figured prominently in the retail or public service sectors of their local economies. If home communities were to remain viable while their young men marched off to war, such men could ill afford to abandon their obligations. The care of large, well-established families, farms, and business, together with their more advanced age, prevented older men from entering the active service. For both the younger and older members, the desire to form or join home guard companies grew out of a desire to protect the very assets that kept these men at home, but such men were also unlikely to submit willingly to tedious drills and musters put on by zealous self-appointed captains.

The very concerns that might have motivated the decision to join home guard companies—families, farms, shops—all probably took precedence over actual service in home protection organizations. Especially if the threat was not immediate, home guard service likely took a back seat to more mundane, but immediate, priorities. An irate home guard captain from Pike County indicated this when he wrote to Yates to find out “what penalty can be inflicted for non attendance of members of such Co.” and complained that “the present [militia] law is not worth a d—n . . . as I see no penalty, and a law without a penalty is of no force . . . I have got up the home guard but that will never amount to any thing as there is no penalty.”²⁸ Captains

27. Roster of Higgins's company included with Bryant Higgins to Richard Yates, July 23, 1863, Yates Family Papers; manuscript federal census for 1860.

28. John G. Sever(?) et al. to Richard Yates, Oct. 15, 1861, Yates Family Papers.

such as this one who wanted their home guard companies to function like military units perhaps understood their role differently from the majority of their men, who joined not to participate in tedious and time-consuming drills, musters, and maneuvers, but to ensure their part in an apparatus of home protection only when needed.

The disjuncture between those who viewed home guard service as strictly voluntary and those who saw it as an arm of the state militia was caused, in part, by Illinoisans' vague understanding of what exactly home service meant. Most petitioners used the term "home guard" in referring to their companies, but others called them "military" companies or even "militia" companies. One writer from Winnebago County asked whether he should organize a local company of "minute men" to defend the state "subject to the call of the Governor."²⁹ In all cases, these different terms all connoted some variant on the popular idea of the citizen-soldier, as distinct from the federally mustered volunteer, but no consensus existed over their exact role.

Home guards were frequently adamant that their offers to protect the state did not extend to federal service. On this point, the Illinois Militia Act or Ten Regiments Act of May 1861 was a major source of confusion. The act, which drew on the system of militia organization under the federal Militia Act of 1792, called for ten regiments to meet Illinois's quota of troops set by the War Department, which would shortly enter the federal service. However, the wording of the act seemed to indicate that the regiments would be primarily a home defensive force. The act was officially "An act to prepare the State of Illinois to protect its own territory, repel invasion, and render efficient and prompt assistance to the United States if demanded," which led many Illinoisans to believe that assistance to the federal government was only a secondary purpose. The act asked that volunteer companies wishing to protect the state compose a roster and pledge themselves to uphold the laws and constitution of the state and the nation and to uniform themselves in accordance with the official state regulation. Arms would be provided by the state, and the various companies would be put into encampments in their respective congressional districts and formed into regiments. It was published in newspapers across the state, and although the title could be misleading, if read carefully the act clearly indicated that it drew on the official system of state militia to fulfill the state's obligation to the federal government.³⁰

29. H. Wood to Richard Yates, June 21, 1863, Yates Family Papers.

30. See for example, "The Ten Regiment Act," *Springfield Illinois State Journal*, May 3, 1861.

Many home guard petitioners apparently did not pay close attention to the wording of the 1861 act or allowed their own preconceptions of the militia or home service to color their reading of the law. J. S. Herod of Hardin County informed Yates that he had formed “a Company . . . for home protection under the act of May 3rd 1861 entitled Melitia” and asked that the state “furnish us with at least 50 or 100 muskets or Rifles,” clearly missing the intent of the law. Only a minority of home guard petitioners understood that the Militia Act was not an adequate tool for organizing home guard units. C. A. Fox acknowledged, “We have the militia law of Illinois, but we suppose sum different proceeding is required in forming home guards.” He was correct that the Militia Act did not provide specifically for the sort of company he proposed, but his request that “your exelency . . . informe us all about the business of orgenizeing a home guard” incorrectly assumed that there was some official mechanism for such organization. Another writer wanted to form a company but wrote, “having no law to go by I send to you for instruction.” Others asked Yates to clarify what they called “the Law in the case and . . . the correct mode of procedure.”³¹

But because no law specifically provided for the organization and arming of home guard companies, Yates’s responses could only be vague gestures of approbation that left many petitioners unsatisfied, since he could not provide them with the arms or invest them with the authority they desired. Yates instructed one petitioner: “arm yourselves and form independent co[mpanie]s,” but this was not what most writers wanted to hear.³² Indeed, they primarily wrote to Yates to request both weapons and the state-vested authority necessary to deal with local rebellious or treasonous elements. In their appeals for arms and authority, home guard petitioners revealed a carefully nuanced understanding of the relationship between the state and its citizens that drew on long-cherished republican principles of mutual obligation. Home guards could not protect themselves without protecting the state, and for this service they expected the state to meet them halfway.

The inability of home guard companies to break up secessionist organizations and arrest the offenders without state authority was a primary point of concern. Many petitioners felt that they would be breaking the law themselves

31. J. S. Herod to Richard Yates, Jan. 10, 1862, C. A. Fox to Richard Yates, Sept. 8, 1861, James M. Eaton to Richard Yates, J. Cunningham et al. to Richard Yates, Sept. 5, 1861, all in Yates Family Papers.

32. Handwritten note on A. B. Cherry to George Harlow, June 30, 1863, Yates Family Papers.

if they acted against the traitors in their midst without authority from the government. James Eaton voiced the concerns of many other home guard captains when he said, "We wish to organize and come under the laws of the United States and the State of Ill[inois] . . . the secessionists here keeps cutting up and we want Authority from Uncle Sam to make them behave them selves." Similarly, after warning Yates of the disloyal Copperheads in his township, J. D. White of Coles County told him, "We must have protection and we desire authority from you as we wish to go according to Law and order." Referring to local "secessionists of the worst stamp," writers from Iroquois County wanted to "enquire of you as to the *Law in the case* and as to the correct mode of procedure with them."³³

In Bureau County, J. W. Merrill of the "Neponset Union Guard" informed Yates that local Rebel sympathizers were making threats against Union men and mailing letters addressed to Jefferson Davis. As postmaster, Merrill assured him, "I have not mailed the letters . . . but have sent them direct to the Post Master Gen'l at Washington," but he worried that he would not be able to prevent his men from taking more direct action. Merrill wrote, "I fear that I cannot restrain the men, we do not wish to resort to Mob Law but such a feeling of Indignation cannot be quelled . . . can't you send us Authority to arrest them and send them to you at Springfield." J. B. Moore of Brown County phrased the concern most articulately when he recommended that "there should be an authorized and armed organization of loyal citizens and that immediately" to prevent bands of guerillas from organizing against the government. "All that we ask or desire," said Moore, "is the requisite authority from the general government to send these bushwackers and their sympathizing friends beyond our lines where their sympathies belong." Without such authority, Moore observed, "as law abiding citizens we are powerless to effect anything except through the slow machinery of the judiciary."³⁴

The primary means of achieving legitimacy and authority in the eyes of the law, according to most petitioners, was the receipt of government arms. However, this raised the question of what exactly would be expected of home guard companies if they received this recognition. Some petitioners believed that accepting arms from the state would grant them authority to use them

33. James M. Eaton to Richard Yates, Sept. 9, 1861, J. D. White to Richard Yates, July 27, 1863, J. Cunningham et al. to Richard Yates, Sept. 5, 1861, all in Yates Family Papers.

34. J. B. Moore to Richard Yates, May 4, 1863, Capt. J. W. Merrill to Richard Yates, June 4, 1861, both in Yates Family Papers.

as independent military companies, while others believed that they would be formally entering the service of the state if they accepted arms, subject to the orders of the state's adjutant general. To remain independent of this authority, some wished to enter into a sort of contract with the state for the use of government arms, the cost of which they would stand responsible for, thus maintaining their independence. Despite their different interpretations, in all cases petitioners believed that the legitimacy and effectiveness of their companies depended on having weapons from the state. Government weapons not only implied authority, they were also badly needed among the rural communities if loyal citizens were to have any hope of self protection.

The lack of firearms in the Illinois countryside was one consequence of the decay of the state's militia system, but as Cephas Leach pointed out in 1861, the economic prosperity and daily peace of the primarily agricultural counties also led farmers to neglect what arms they did possess. An emigrant's guide to Illinois from 1837 had even advised the would-be yeoman settler to "let his rifle rust"; many had evidently taken this to heart by 1861.³⁵ This is not to say that some Illinois farmers and townsmen did not own firearms, but the guns they did possess seemed inadequate to the task to which home guards believed they were called. William Grimshaw, who in 1861 led an expedition from Pike County, Illinois, across the Mississippi River into Missouri, complained to Yates: "Our Rifles are *farmers* rifles of all gauges, no regularity." Milton Hathaway in Randolph County wrote, "We have no armes except som few. I has a small rifle." Unlike most home guard petitioners, Hathaway did not ask Yates for arms but simply informed him, "We air in pour fix for the work." The situation was even worse in Ogle County, where Charles Royce reported, "We have no guns in [this] part of the County. Some of us does not know hardly how to load and shoot a gun as farming has always been our Buisiness." However, Royce wrote, "I think it is high time that our Young Men was Practicing the Art of War." In Edgar County, when eighteen-year-old A. D. Bovee organized a company of "cadets" to practice the art of war, they could not gather enough guns to arm themselves. Bovee asked: "See if you could not let us have some old arms to Drill with . . . most any old muskets will do for we can clean them up."³⁶

35. *Illinois in 1837* (Philadelphia: S. Augustus Mitchell, 1837), 71.

36. William A. Grimshaw, misaddressed to Gov. John Wood Quartermaster II, Sept. 5, 1861, Milton Hathaway to Richard Yates, Feb. 17, 1863, Charles Royce to Richard Yates, Feb. 17, 1863, A. D. Bovee to Richard Yates, July 20, 1863, all in Yates Family Papers. Bovee's company, from the town of Young America, was appropriately named the "Young America Guard Cadets."

A. D. Bovee also demonstrated acumen for persuasion that revealed his complex understanding of home guard service, assuring Yates, “We will stand responsible for [the arms] and we will hold ourselves in readiness if you want us as state guards.” By offering to stand financially and materially responsible for the weapons they received from the government, petitioners like Bovee suggested that accepting arms under such terms would allow their companies to remain materially independent from the state. After all, if they were truly state soldiers, the arms would have been issued them without any such caveat. Young Bovee’s offer to become state troops only “if you want us” implied that they would not consider themselves as such unless explicitly called by the governor. Charles Royce made a similar offer to “give security for their Delivery” in his request for state arms and also offered his company “to answer Your or Uncle Abraham’s Call.” Likewise, although Mac MacCallum and two other petitioners from Knox County did not offer to give security or stand responsible for the arms they requested, they did express their desire to remain independent from the regular service by carefully phrasing their offer “to organize into Military Companies to be prepared to assist the Government.”³⁷

Even as home guard companies acknowledged that they needed material assistance from the state, most basically in the form of firearms, they were careful to make clear that accepting state arms did not place them at the command of the state. Petitioners to Yates tried to negotiate a line between independence from and obligation to the state, reflecting the belief among most of them that their companies would remain local and independent—that they would not become a part of the state militia. As James Wheatley put it, “Many of us are too poor to privately arm ourselves and furthermore as we propose to work for the State or U.S. we think we ought to be furnished with arms, and keep our money to take care of our families, if an emergency should arise that we would have to leave them.”³⁸ Wheatley, like other petitioners, understood his voluntarism as a give-and-take with the state. His men wanted to protect their homes, he emphasized, but needed the state to provide the means.

Beyond the question of receiving arms from the state, many home guard petitioners also included additional conditions and caveats in their offers to assist the government. If there was any question that receiving state arms would

37. Charles Royce to Richard Yates, Feb. 17, 1863, Mac MacCallum, H. P. Wood, and N. S. Taylor to Richard Yates, Feb. 26, 1863, both in Yates Family Papers.

38. James Wheatley to Richard Yates, June 22, 1863, Yates Family Papers.

somehow make home guard companies beholden to the state, petitioners sought to clarify the terms under which they would serve. Home guard companies were intended to protect home communities, and they were adamant that they would not serve outside their own counties unless absolutely necessary. Home guards were eager to keep the local “secesh” under control and to actively repel an invasion, if need be, but captains also repeatedly informed the governor that their men would only serve if they could remain at home and specified that they were not volunteering as state or federal troops. Many were wary even of entering the service of the state in anything like an official capacity and phrased their appeals for assistance with great caution. When D. J. Smith of Gallatia sent the roster of his company of home guards to the adjutant general, he included a letter to Yates which clarified that he did so “with the distinct understanding that we are not to be called into servis away from Home unless the State be invaded by a hostile foe.” What was more, Smith added, “We could increase our Company greatly if the impression or fear that we will be called into servis and attached to the Regular Army [is corrected].”³⁹ Smith’s guards would not consent to federal service, nor even to service away from their home county unless in extreme circumstances.

Others emphasized their local obligations as home guards more subtly. J. M. Galbraith of Marion County described the local Copperhead threat in detail, then offered: “Should you find it necessary to meet this movement with an armed force, and should you determine to call out a home guard in this region I myself sir am at your service. I should to day be in the United States army but for the care of a helpless family.” Once more before the end of his letter, Galbraith specified that he was ready to offer his services to “raise home guards in this corner,” making sure that Yates was aware of the limitations imposed on him by family and geography.⁴⁰

However, even as they asserted that they would not serve beyond the borders of their home county or outside the state, the language of home protection used by many petitioners tied the interest of the people tightly with the interest of the state. Lewis Hammach of Perry County wrote, “We want to form companies so as not be compelled to leave the county for a long term . . . we have already sent soldiers from this county so as to weaken our union party and we think it not safe to send any more at present on account of home troubles that might possibly arise.”⁴¹

39. D. J. Smith to Richard Yates, Sept. 9, 1861, Yates Family Papers.

40. J. M. Galbraith to Richard Yates, Aug. 24, 1861, Yates Family Papers.

41. Lewis Hammach to Richard Yates, Aug. 20, 1861, Yates Family Papers.

Others were less subtle in tying their own interests to those of the state by emphasizing the failure of the government to protect them. William Cook and E. C. Drew informed the governor, "Knowing we cannot depend on the Government for protection we wish to take measures to protect ourselves" and made the governor a kind of bargain: "We can find the men can you furnish us the arms." Cook and Drew proposed a battalion that "will drill and be ready to turn out at a minutes warning if their services are needed" but made it clear that theirs would be an independent force, not a body of state militia, as they would "find capital enough to be personally responsible for the safe return of the arms when called for." Their letter implied that their company would inevitably protect the state as they protected themselves, even though the state had failed to protect them. The least Yates could do, according to Cook and Drew, was supply vigilant citizens with the arms they needed to do the work the government neglected. Similarly, from the southern border town of Cave-in-Rock, James Mitchell wrote "regarding the unprotected character of this border" and admonished the governor for failing to respond to an earlier letter he had sent on the subject. Mitchell informed Yates that the local ferry between Kentucky and Illinois was the only means for pro-Union Kentuckians to escape Rebel raids, and "the people of this place want arms to protect this ferry boat." What was more, "1/2 the voting people of Hardin Co. have gone into the Federal army and the other half ask now to protect *Your border* as well as their houses." Out of desperation, Mitchell and his Union friends on both sides of the river had already obtained arms from unionist clubs in Louisville, Kentucky, and Jeffersonville, Indiana; now they asked Yates "that a few muskets and necessary accoutrements be forwarded to this place for the use of such as take refuge here." As Mitchell implied, it was the least Yates could do for citizens who wished only to protect "*Your border*."⁴²

For all of the conditions home guards placed on the sort of service they were willing to offer the state, and all of their assertions of independence from direct state authority, home guard petitioners were equally concerned with couching their appeals in patriotic language. While this was in many cases probably a strategy to gain the sympathy of the state's chief executive, there is no reason to doubt that genuine patriotism went hand in hand with the language of home service. Writers to Yates tied their interest in home protection tightly to the

42. William P. Cook and E. C. Drew to Richard Yates, June 23, 1863, James Mitchell to Richard Yates, Nov. 15, 1861, both in Yates Family Papers.

patriotic defense of the state and the Union. Thomas Wilson, who expressed the reluctance of his men to leave their homes, was nevertheless careful to note that “these men are willing to discharge their duty as ‘lovers of our Old Flag and the Union’ and if emergency should require it to Fight for it.” Wilson emphasized, “Our cause is a common one and our interest the same” and urged Yates to give him the “necessary information” to form a company, both “for our own good and that of the country.” A group of writers from Iroquois County similarly assured Yates, “the mass of our citizens are for the Union and willing to make any sacrifice to enforce the General Government.” As C. A. Fox noted, the chance to protect their communities through home service was also a chance to “show fourth our patriotism by our works.”⁴³

As the war dragged on, Illinoisans who chose to remain at home constructed a new apparatus to “show fourth” their patriotism in the form of the Union Leagues, and in forming these new organizations, they drew on preexisting models of home protection and continued to express motives that prioritized local safety firmly alongside state and national security. Frank Klement places the organization of the first Union League in Pekin, Illinois, in 1862 as an outgrowth of the Union club movement in Kentucky and Tennessee, but something like the League had existed within many local communities since the beginning of the war. Many writers to Yates before 1862 made mention of “Union clubs” or the local “Union organization” when they wrote about forming home guard companies. The idea of organized resistance to perceived threats from organized bands and companies of Copperheads or Knights of the Golden Circle was certainly not new to the Union League model. However, with the establishment of a basic umbrella organization, the Union League became a significant force in many Illinois communities.

From Pekin, the League spread across Illinois, and established a statewide grand council, which met for the first time in Bloomington in fall 1862, when it drafted a constitution and elected officers. In early 1863, the statewide organization suffered from widespread retrenchment against the Emancipation Proclamation, enrollment, and military losses in the east, but by the spring, the organization was spreading more rapidly across the state as the result of an aggressive campaign by members of the grand council to galvanize unionist citizens under a common banner.

Delegates from the council also traveled to neighboring states in an attempt

43. Thomas Wilson to Richard Yates, Nov. 15, 1861, J. Cunningham et al. to Richard Yates, Sept. 5, 1861, C. A. Fox to Richard Yates, Sept. 8, 1861, all in Yates Family Papers.

to take the Union League umbrella national. The Midwest became ground zero for this campaign, with Illinois as the centerpiece, but spreading beyond the region proved difficult. Other states already had pro-Union clubs and leagues that were less overtly political than in the Midwest, and they were not willing to transform themselves to follow the midwestern model. Klement notes that “in the upper Midwest the league was developing as the strong right arm of the Republican party; in the eastern cities the league was more a by-product of patriotism and less an auxiliary of the party,” but he overstates the degree to which the local Union Leagues functioned as a “strong right arm” or “military auxiliary” to the Republican Party.⁴⁴

While the Union Leagues at the state level undoubtedly flourished with the assistance of Republican governors like Richard Yates in Illinois and Oliver Morton in Indiana, the numerous local Leagues continued to function much as the older, more informal pro-Union clubs, organizations, and home guards had since the beginning of the war. The important difference after 1863 was not the additional clout they may or may not have contributed to the Republican Party (which remains difficult or impossible to measure) but the fact that the Union League gave disparate pro-Union clubs and companies an opportunity to unite under a common organizational identity. Local clubs, reorganized as Union Leagues, could feel they were a part of a broader organization of loyal citizens rather than merely bands of lonely patriots shouting in the dark.

Significantly, with this new sense of working toward a common good, local Union Leagues continued to organize companies of home guards. Thomas Nicholson of Vermillion County wrote to Yates as the secretary of his local Union League in July 1863, informing him that his and two neighboring Leagues had recently convened “for the purpose of making some efficient arrangements for defense and protection of persons and property in this part of the state (and other parts when called for) as emergencies may require.” At the convention, a proposition to “form the different Leagues into Home Guards was unanimously adopted,” although Nicholson later specified, “they will be formed outside and independent of the League.”⁴⁵

Others were less concerned with the propriety of arming their Leagues directly. Members of the Centralia Union League in Marion County asked about the prospect of “arming the Leagues in this portion of the State in order to assist in repelling any invasion that might occur,” and R. H. Stephenson

44. Klement, *Dark Lanterns*, 47.

45. Thomas Nicholson to Richard Yates, July 27, 1863, Yates Family Papers.

of Putnam County stated baldly that members of his local League had voted to organize themselves into “a military company” and could probably field at least seventy-five men. Sherman Moore of Massac County also informed Yates, “We the members of the Union League now propose to form ourselves in a home guard. . . . [I]f you will grant us the necessary arms and equipment we will drill regular and hold our selves in reddyenss for any immergency and Pledge you our lives our fortune and our sacred honor that they shall be used only for the bennifit of the State of Illinois and the United States.”⁴⁶ Conspicuously absent from such appeals were any references to the Republican or Democratic parties or partisan politics generally. Although the term “Copperhead” was used frequently, it was more often in the broader context of disloyalty or treason, rather than in specific reference to the Democratic Party. This is not to say that partisanship was unimportant to the Union Leagues but rather to emphasize that it was only part of a broader perceived mandate of loyalty and home protection.

While expressing support for the state government, the Union, or the United States could often be equated with support for the Republican administration—or in 1864 the Republican-dominated Union Party—Klement’s description of the Union Leagues as primarily political organizations misses their significance. The impetus for forming and arming Union Leagues was not only partisan politics but public safety after a republican model of popular militia participation. Union League writers referenced their desire to protect their “neighborhood” and their intention to repel “any invasion that might occur,” much the way earlier home guard petitioners had done. A. B. Cherry from the McDonough County Union League cited the same fears as earlier writers, warning that “those bold traitors are all armed and are hurrying up the conflict before Union men can get armed.” Writing “by authority of the Union League,” J. D. White of Coles County asked Yates to authorize the local League “to Raise a company of Home gards for the purpose of protecting them selves and all Loyal citizens from the aggression of Disloyal Copperheads.”⁴⁷

In fact, most of the petitioners who identified themselves as members or representatives of their local Union Leagues used the specific term “home

46. R. D. Noleman, L. P. Tufts, and J. P. Hallam to Richard Yates, June 26, 1863, R. H. Stephenson to Richard Yates, May 11, 1863, Sherman Moore to Richard Yates, July 18, 1863, all in Yates Family Papers.

47. J. G. McCoy to Richard Yates, June 23, 1863, R. D. Nolman et al. to Richard Yates, June 26, 1863, A. B. Cherry to Richard Yates, June 30, 1863, J. D. White to Richard Yates, July 27, 1863, all in Yates Family Papers.

guard” to describe their companies, as contrasted with many earlier writers who had used “militia,” “minutemen,” and “home guard” interchangeably. Although we should be careful not to read too much into this subtle shift in language, the continued association of home service with a republican lexicon of popular militancy, and the absence of partisan rhetoric, suggests a motive for the Union Leagues that went beyond their affiliation with Republican politics.

Although the form and original intent of Union League home guard companies often transcended partisanship, as the organization of the Leagues increased they did begin to assume more directly partisan roles, such as distributing campaign literature, canvassing for votes, manning polling places, and promoting Union Party candidates in the elections of 1864. In fact, the spread of the Union League model for home guard organizing may explain why the urgent calls for government arms finally came to fruition during the political campaigns. As pro-Union citizens united under a more stable organizational structure directly supported by the Republican state administration, providing government arms to local home guards apparently became more feasible. In April 1864, Yates wrote to Adj. Gen. Allen Fuller that the federal government had at last agreed to release 20,000 stands of arms to the state of Illinois for the purpose of arming the state’s “militia” companies. Many of these were, in fact, Union Leagues or home guard companies that were auxiliary to the League.⁴⁸

The fact that Leagues performing political work were frequently armed justifiably disturbed Democrats. In October, the Democratic *Carthage Republican* from Hancock County reported that the Union League of Fountain Green Township had received a shipment of government arms and wondered if a similar company not composed of “union leaguers,” would be similarly supplied.⁴⁹ This suspicion of the Union League’s motives led to Democratic calls to arms against the threat of Union League aggression. But this mutual saber-rattling was not new to the election year; it was the same sort of internecine arms race that had been going on since the earliest days of the war, when home guard petitioners wrote to Yates fearing insurrection in the countryside; but the tables were now turned and the difference was significant. Democrats voiced the same concerns about the armed Union

48. Richard Yates to General Fuller, Apr. 12, 1864, Yates Family Papers.

49. “The ‘Union’ Leagues Arming in Hancock County,” and “Another Company Organized,” *Carthage Republican*, Oct. 27, 1864.

Leagues as unionists had in 1861 about armed bands of “secesh” roaming the border counties. With Republicans now apparently controlling their own armed companies, Democrats feared a military state bent on eradicating dissent. This critique also intensified as the federal military presence within Illinois increased in 1863 and 1864 with the formation of the hundred days regiments and the Invalid (or Veteran Reserve) Corps. Ironically, this same presence began to draw potential home guard and Union League recruits away from their independent organizations and into the federal service.⁵⁰

As more independent home guard companies began to fall under the broad organizational arms of the Union League, new opportunities for home service also became available. In the spring of 1863, Governor Yates issued his first call for ten hundred days regiments, which were to be used exclusively for service behind the lines for a limited enlistment of one hundred days. This was service deemed acceptable to many independent home guard companies, and many were formed to join these state service regiments wholesale. Citizens who did not already belong to home guard companies also joined the hundred days regiments, despite some suspicion that these regiments would be sent off to the war. A soldier in the 73d Illinois Infantry wrote from the front to warn his seventeen-year-old son against joining a hundred days regiment on the grounds that “you will join the army as a home guard and the first thing you no you may be in the South.”⁵¹ Despite these worries, however, hundreds across the state joined the short-term regiments.

In May and June 1864, the hundred days regiments from Illinois entered federal service as the 132d through 143d, and 145th Illinois Volunteer Infantry. Most of the regiments were sent to Kentucky or Tennessee to perform noncombat duty, such as guarding railroad tracks, depots, and bridges. Only the 133d Illinois served its entire term within the state, guarding Confederate prisoners at the barracks at Rock Island. But though their brief service took many of Illinois’s hundred days volunteers farther afield than they had intended, all of the regiments were mustered out of service in September and October of

50. For Democratic dissent during the war, see Weber, *Copperheads*; Klement, *Copperheads in the Middle West*; and Joel Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860–1868* (New York: Norton, 1977). For Illinois specifically, see Bruce Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation: The Election of 1862 in Illinois,” *Civil War History* 39 (1993): 101–25; Robert E. Sterling, “Civil War Draft Resistance in Illinois,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 64 (1971): 244–66.

51. Joseph Van Nattan to Currency Van Nattan, July 15, 1863, Van Nattan-Renne Family Papers, ALPL.

1864, as promised. Because these volunteers understood from the beginning that their service would be limited, these regiments attracted not only civilians but also discharged, wounded, or slightly disabled veterans who had already spent time in the federal service. These were also the men who would have been likely to form or join independent home guard companies, and because the hundred days volunteers were to be paid, while home guards had to plead even for arms, organized state service provided an attractive alternative for a sizeable pool of potential home guard organizers and volunteers.⁵²

Like the hundred days regiments, the Invalid Corps or Veteran Reserve Corps, organized as an auxiliary to the federal service in 1863, attracted disabled and discharged men who might otherwise have formed or joined home guard companies. The promise of a government paycheck and the greater respect that came with regular military service would have provided substantial reasons for such veterans to turn away from independent home guard companies. Like the hundred days regiments, these units also acted as home protection organizations, and could be used as guards for vulnerable locations, such as river crossings, railroad tracks, and supply depots, and to quell potential anti-draft uprisings. In the fall of 1864, detachments from the Twenty-Second Regiment of the Veteran Reserve Corps arrested deserters and draft resisters in Illinois and Indiana, and guarded training camps, military prisons, and public stores. These were precisely the threats Illinoisans had wished to meet and the points they had suggested protecting between 1861 and 1863 with home guard companies. As regularly organized federal troops like the hundred days regiments and the Veteran Reserve Corps began to arrive at these sensitive locations, the perceived need for independent home guard companies was apparently alleviated.⁵³

By late 1863, the letters to Governor Yates on the subject of forming home guard companies dropped off completely. Although many informal local companies probably remained in communities across Illinois, and the Union Leagues continued to form quasi-military companies well into 1865,

52. There are numerous letters from discharged and disabled veterans asking to raise companies for the hundred days regiments in the Yates Family Papers.

53. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1880–1901), ser. 3, vol 5:565. For the Veteran Reserve Corps, see Paul A. Cimbala, “Soldiering on the Home Front: The Veteran Reserve Corps and the Northern People,” in *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments*, ed. Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2002), 182–218; and Stanley Michale Suplick Jr., “The United States Invalid Corps/Veteran Reserve Corps” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Minnesota, 1969).

Illinoisans no longer seemed compelled to seek either arms or authority from the state. The innovation of new forms of home-front troops, combined with war weariness and perhaps a realization that a statewide civil war was not as imminent as it had once appeared, made home guard service seem less urgent. The apparent reluctance of the state government to support independent home guard companies may also have played a part. Even the Charleston riot in Coles County in spring 1864 and the famed “Northwestern Conspiracy” apparently did not excite the kind of hysteria witnessed during the first two years of the war. Would-be citizen soldiers seemed willing, by war’s end, to allow the state or federal governments to deal with any threats that might occur, and to relax their sense of obligation as protectors on the home front. As the necessity for home guards disappeared, so too did the long-cherished republican idea that every citizen might, if emergency required, take up arms as the soldiery of the nation.⁵⁴

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the concept of independent home guards was virtually eliminated from national discourse on the military, the militia, and the nascent organization of what would later become the National Guard. Although voluntary militia companies remained in vogue after the war, especially among veterans and other civic-minded individuals, such independent companies would never again fight in an American war.

As they had in the antebellum era, postbellum militia companies drilled, marched, and carried weapons in parades and festivals and held exhibitions of marksmanship and close-order drills. In Illinois, militia companies traveled around the state, putting on demonstrations and parades and represented their home communities much like amateur sports teams or other civic organizations. By the late 1870s, many of these companies were incorporated into the nascent Illinois National Guard, which reported to the adjutant general of the state. As labor unrest and the threat of anarchism grew in places like Chicago

54. For the Charleston riot, see Robert D. Sampson, “‘Pretty Damned Warm Times’: The 1864 Charleston Riot and the ‘Inalienable Right of Revolution,’” *Illinois Historical Journal* 89 (Summer 1996): 99–116; Ken Anderson, “The Role of Abraham Lincoln and Members of His Family in the Charleston Riot during the Civil War,” *Lincoln Herald* 79 (1977): 53–60; and Charles Coleman and Paul Spence, “The Charleston Riot,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 33 (Mar. 1940): 7–56. For the Northwestern Conspiracy, see Robert Churchill, “Liberty, Conscriptio, and a Party Divided”; Lewis J. Wertheim, “The Indianapolis Treason Trials, The Elections of 1864 and the Power of the Partisan Press,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 85 (1989): 236–50; Stephen Z. Starr, “Was There a Northwestern Conspiracy?” *Filson Club History Quarterly* 38 (1964): 323–41.

during the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, the Illinois National Guard became an increasingly professional organization, and the independent militia companies that remained outside of the Guard structure were systematically dismantled. Lawmakers and the public worried that armed independent companies of socialists, anarchists, and union members would openly revolt against the government, and legislation was enacted to prevent such organizations from arming themselves and engaging in military-style drills. In 1903, the National Guard was made subject to federal authority as well as that of the individual states, creating in effect a vast reserve of federal troops. The formal organization and militarization of the National Guard accomplished fully the transition from the republican ideal of militia service to the federalist model of a centrally controlled and professionalized military force.⁵⁵

This move away from a truly citizen militia was inaugurated during the Civil War, as revealed by Illinoisans' struggle to define and negotiate the terms of home guard service. The central questions around which the language of home protection hinged during the war were what sort of service citizens could be expected to provide and what sort of assistance the government was obligated to give them. In sorting out the answers, Illinoisans who wished to perform home service engaged in a negotiation over the duties and obligations inherent in the citizen/state relationship, offering an alternative to the dominant model of voluntarism that came to define Americans' concept of legitimate wartime military service. Home guard members acted out of a genuine concern for their family and property; and from this concern, their actions ultimately tied them to a strong strand of pro-Union and pro-Republican ideology. What made the connection between private and public interests particularly resonant in the early months of the war was not only political passion but a strong desire to protect local interests.

Home guards' concepts of service drew on several ideas: that the forces which threatened their families and livelihoods also threatened the govern-

55. For the Illinois National Guard, see Hannah, *Manhood, Citizenship, and the National Guard*. For the centralization of the home guard model in the twentieth century, see Barry M. Stentiford, *The American Home Guard: The State Militia in the Twentieth Century* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2002). For the National Guard, see Cooper, *Rise of the National Guard*; Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*; Hill, *Minute Man in Peace and War*; Riker, *Soldiers of the States*; and Frederick M. Stern, *The Citizen Army: Key to Defense in the Atomic Age* (New York: St. Martin's, 1957). For the changing role of militia across the nineteenth century, see Robert Reinders, "Militia and Public Order in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American Studies* 11 (1977): 81–101.

ment; that to take action against these threats they needed the sanction and assistance of the government; and that the government was incapable of defending either itself or its citizens without their assistance. These ideas, or variations on them, demonstrated home guards' understanding of mutual obligation between citizens and the state that was by no means weighted to one side or the other. By protecting themselves, home guards argued that they were also protecting the government, and in return they expected the arms and authority necessary to their task.

As the mechanisms for mobilizing home service became more centralized beginning in 1863—with the success of the Union League model, the raising of hundred days regiments, and the organization of the Invalid Corps—and began to fall more directly under either state or federal control, the idea of independent home service as a mutual compact between citizens and the state was supplanted with a model that emphasized volunteerism to the state on the part of the citizens. Selfless service to the state and the Union was regarded as the only true wartime patriotism, and the home guard understanding of mutual obligation between state and citizen clearly fell outside the ideal.

As the evolving and complex wartime rhetoric of home guard organization indicates, the republican model of the citizen-soldier as a home defensive force became subordinate to the centralized military authority of the state and subsequently the federal government. In their letters to Governor Yates, Illinoisans struggled with this transition, offering their services as independent companies of citizen-soldiers but realizing at the same time that only by making themselves somehow subject to the state could they obtain the legitimacy necessary to confront the threats around them. That Illinoisans' early attempts to negotiate a middle ground between obligatory and voluntary militia service seem to have disappeared by 1864 and that they were further downplayed in the aftermath of the war perhaps best illustrates the ultimate success of the federal model.

Much of the scholarship on the Union Civil War effort continues to center on the ideologically galvanizing influence of military service, especially as a means to promote emancipation and postwar northern nationalism. But if we conceive of the war simply as a triumph of selfless voluntarism in support of patriotic principles, we miss a significant piece of the wartime picture. Between 1861 and 1863, patriotic Illinoisans, who supported the Union as fully as the soldiers in the field, articulated a different vision of volunteerism and service to the wartime government by offering themselves not as soldiers to fight a war but as armed citizens to protect their homes, families, and state.

It was a vision of republican citizenship that prioritized local interests over obligations to state or federal authority but also linked local safety to the safety of the state and the nation. It was a vision obliterated by the postwar mania for regimental histories, battlefield commemorations, and understandings of wartime volunteerism that hinged only on broad concepts of “Union” and “freedom” or on the pathos and heroic patriotism of the battlefield. If we are to understand Union Civil War service in broader terms than volunteer military service, or even organized home-front benevolent activism, it is a vision we cannot fail to acknowledge. A more complete understanding of the Union home front must turn not only on the objectives and activities of civilian service but also the complex motivations and competing ideologies that both created home-front conflict and fueled the ultimate success of a unionist version of the postbellum nation.⁵⁶

56. For the wartime and post-bellum emphasis on the volunteer ideal, see Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861–1865* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2001); Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet*; Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Knopf, 1991), especially chap. 6, “The Vicarious War”; and Hess, *Liberty, Virtue, and Progress*, especially chap. 4, “Liberty and War” and chap. 6, “Continuity and Change.” Most social histories of the Civil War emphasize the rhetoric of selfless voluntarism on behalf of patriotic or other ideological principles, but see especially James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), and McPherson, *What They Fought For, 1861–1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1994). More nuanced examinations of soldiers’ motivations also privilege the idea of selfless voluntarism, including Phillip Shaw Paludan, “A People’s Contest”: *The Union and Civil War, 1861–1865*, 2d ed. (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1996); and Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experiences* (New York: Viking, 1988). For postwar northern nationalism, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2001); and Lawson, *Patriot Fires*.