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Quentin Roosevelt (1897–1918): A Life and Death in Objects

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Introduction: When Objects Tell a Story Words Cannot Express

The most intriguing materials held at the Houghton Library do not speak. Such is the case of a photograph album, sent in 1919 by a French family in memory of Quentin Roosevelt, the youngest son of former president Theodore Roosevelt, who was shot down by a German airplane in the sky over France during the First World War. The senders were the Normants, a local bourgeois family who met Quentin Roosevelt by chance when he was on duty in the American Air Service. From this accidental meeting, a strong friendship grew between them. The Normants took pictures of him as he spent spare time with them, which ended up being the last images of him before he died. The family, perhaps aware of this fact, decided to arrange the images into a story, a photograph album of Quentin Roosevelt's stay in France.

Few of Quentin's letters describe his time with the Normants, but the album depicts their friendship most clearly. This artefact can help historians to better understand not just their relationship, but, more broadly, the special relationship built between American soldiers, their families, and the French during the First World War. In a similar way, Quentin Roosevelt's personal objects form part of a rich material archive that strongly benefits historians by adding to written documents that regularly remain silent on so many aspects of past events and individuals. As revealed by the way they were used, these artefacts

hold the benefit of presenting history from the perspective of individual actors rather than that of the political and military organizations.

The materials discussed in this article are part of the Theodore Roosevelt Collection, a vast archive assembled in New York after Theodore Roosevelt's death by the Roosevelt Memorial Association in 1923, and donated in 1943 to the library of Harvard University, the former president's alma mater. The initial collection contained more than 10,000 printed materials, to which were added a large variety of non-written items, including some 2,500 cartoons and 5,000 photographs, mostly about Theodore Roosevelt's political career.¹ Today, however, the collection is not limited to the renowned president's career, but instead gathers much of the family's archives. The Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers assemble the private documents of Theodore's wife Edith and their children, Theodore, Jr., Kermit, Quentin, Archibald, and Ethel.² Additionally, the Theodore Roosevelt papers contain letters sent by the president to his children.³ Alongside Theodore Roosevelt's presidential archives held by the Library of Congress, and the archives of the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site in Long Island, the collection at Harvard forms the core of the materials on the 25th president's life and his direct family. These documents are now partly digitized.⁴

Quentin Roosevelt was Theodore and Ethel Roosevelt's fifth and last child. Born in 1897, he followed the usual course for sons of influential and wealthy East Coast families. He first attended the Groton School, an establishment for the elite founded in 1884 by the Episcopal priest Endicott Peabody, before entering Harvard as an undergraduate student, thus following the steps of his father and his three older brothers. His first experience with aeronautics was on French soil, when, at the age of 11, he attended the first international aeronautic competition in 1909 in Reims.⁵ From this founding experience,

¹ Thomas Little, "The Theodore Roosevelt Collection at Harvard," *Harvard Library Bulletin* V, no. 3 (Autumn, 1951): 376–378, <https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37363602>.

² See the Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers, 1863–1977, MS Am 2835, Houghton Library, Harvard University, <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990091328510203941/catalog>, especially Series II (Theodore Roosevelt Series) and Series IV (Quentin Roosevelt Series).

³ For letters to Theodore Roosevelt from Quentin Roosevelt, see the Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers 1863–1977, MS Am 2835 (353); for letters to Quentin Roosevelt from Theodore Roosevelt, see the Theodore Roosevelt additional correspondence and compositions, 1873–1945, MS Am 1834 (1014–1047), Houghton Library, Harvard University, <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990088506200203941/catalog>.

⁴ Digitized records are available through the Harvard Library online catalog, HOLLIS; additionally, the [Theodore Roosevelt Center Digital Library](#) includes archives from the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, the Library of Congress, and Harvard, among others.

⁵ The competition was the Gordon Bennett Cup for speed in 1909, won by Glenn H. Curtiss. The event was massive and convened 150,000 spectators. William F. Tremble, "De 'Rheims' à Reims: Glenn H. Curtiss, le trophée Gordon Bennett et la création d'un héros international de l'aviation en 1909," in Stéphane Tison, *L'imaginaire de l'aviation pionnière: Contribution à l'histoire des représentations de la conquête aérienne, 1903–1927* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 261–264.

the young Roosevelt then pursued this passion in several of his own writings culminating in an engineering science class at Harvard. During his time at university, Quentin met Flora Whitney, a young woman from another wealthy and influential family, to whom he would later be engaged.

On April 25, 1917, Quentin Roosevelt volunteered for the Air Service of the new American Expeditionary Forces.⁶ Leaving his fiancée Flora Whitney, he arrived in France that August as a lieutenant; he then trained in aerial combat for ten months before joining the front near the town of Château-Thierry on the Marne River. On July 14, 1918, during his second flight mission, he was shot down by a German airplane.⁷

At his death, Quentin Roosevelt joined the collective memory for some in French society, especially because his death coincided with the *fête nationale française*, commonly known as Bastille Day, and for an even larger part of American society, which was deeply affected by the war. To acknowledge their link to Quentin Roosevelt's fate, U.S. soldiers would rarely send letters but more often objects such as dried flowers from the pilot's grave (see fig. 1), postcards of that same grave, or even small pieces of his wrecked plane.⁸

⁶ Letter to Flora Whitney, 1917, Flora Whitney Miller papers relating to Quentin Roosevelt, MS Am 2925, box 5, folder 97.

⁷ After a short period of doubt, Quentin's death was officially confirmed by German military aviation on July 20. "Les Allemands confirment la mort de Quentin Roosevelt," *Le Journal*, July 20, 1918, SHNSH, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o276376>.

⁸ Dried flowers from Quentin Roosevelt's grave, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o276676>, and a plane fragment, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o276653>, both held at Sagamore Hill. Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University.



Figure 1. Dried flowers from Quentin Roosevelt's grave, Sagamore Hill National Historic Site.

The Roosevelt family received a large amount of these artefacts, revealing the significance of Quentin Roosevelt's death in the eyes of American fighters in France at that time. In a similar way, the Normant family chose to piece together the photos they had of Quentin to assemble the album they sent to Flora Whitney (see fig. 2). Edithe Normant, daughter of the family, sent the album along with a letter, written in English, in which she expressed the meaning of this artefact: "I have been trying to find all the pictures we took last year, when Quentin used to come. ... I have put them together and am sending them to you, because I guess that American and French hearts are alike, and wish to keep even the small things that can tell of those who are not coming back."⁹ It seemed as if objects could tell a story that words could not express about this unique

⁹ Letter from Edithe Normant to Flora Whitney (March 27, 1919), Flora Whitney Miller papers relating to Quentin Roosevelt, 1891–1968, MS Am 2925 (45); for the album sent by the Normants, see Flora Whitney Miller papers, MS Am 2925 (99). Houghton Library, Harvard University, <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990091328450203941/catalog>.

relationship with Quentin Roosevelt. Edithe Normant expressed here a work of memory led in large parts of American and French societies severely hit by war.



Figure 2. Album with 32 photos of Quentin's stay in France.

In a 1995 paper, French medievalist Olivier Guyotjeannin insisted on the need for historians to deepen their comprehension of documents by analyzing not only their contents but the way they were designed, their materiality, and the process of their composition.¹⁰ The study of materiality and what materials communicate to the historian is an important way of understanding the writing of history by the ones who lived it, leaving their footprints to be analyzed. An event such as Quentin Roosevelt's death does not anchor in history as on marble but rebounds in collective memory, as if constantly mobilized. Therefore, the non-written materials sent to Quentin's mourning relatives testify beyond words to emotion and sadness that could not be expressed otherwise. Applying this reading to some of the artefacts in the Theodore Roosevelt Collection at Houghton Library, I will first look at what the materiality of the archives can teach us about Quentin Roosevelt's experience in France. I will then detail how his sudden death pushed the Normant family into a process of remembering that led them to create the photo album, which in turn reframed Quentin Roosevelt's own experience of the war in

¹⁰ Olivier Guyotjeannin, "L'érudition transfigurée," in *Passés recomposés: Champs et chantiers de l'histoire*, ed. Jean Boutier and Dominique Julia (Paris, Autrement, 1995), 152–162.

light of his death. Hence this remembering process makes the artefact valuable for historians to better understand the American relationship with France during the period of 1917 to 1919.

I: The Creation of Quentin Roosevelt's Archive, Framing the Story of His Death

Archives give historians key information about what happened to documents after they were produced and how they contributed to private and collective memories through time. Arlette Farge argues that archives do not build up a story, but rather are simply a testimony of an individual's actions at one moment, which was later either kept or lost through the circumstances of history. Moreover, archives do not trace any linear narrative; they form a puzzle in which the meaning is already set by the manipulation of the materials from when they are first produced until when they are deposited in an archival repository.¹¹

In 1921, Quentin Roosevelt's older brother, Kermit, gathered the letters sent from and to his brother that depicted his wartime experiences. Some of the letters, which are now held in the Houghton Library, are full of erasures and strikethroughs marked in pencil. These marks are generally set at the top and the bottom of the letters; erasures at the beginning or the end of messages correlate largely with the most intimate parts, the ones asking for news from relatives and recalling private life events. It is, therefore, more than likely that Kermit marked the originals as he selected and censored Quentin's writing in order to publish the parts most linked to his memory. The book that assembled the papers served as a public eulogy in honor of the deceased brother and logically excluded details he thought were too private.¹² In a similar way, the photo album made by the Normants for Quentin's fiancée at the end of the war was presented in a hardcover book meant to resist time, whereas the personal letters exchanged during the war between Quentin and his family were necessarily more materially ephemeral due in the first place to the scarcity of good paper at that time in France. Hence one can see how archives can be organized and modified within a particularly dramatic period for different purposes.

The Theodore Roosevelt Collection at the Houghton Library was a legacy of the Roosevelt Memorial Association,¹³ funded days after the former president's death in

¹¹ Arlette Farge, *Le goût de l'archive* (Paris, Seuil, 1989), 176.

¹² The book presents Quentin's military experience during the First World War in chronological order as follows: "The Way of the Eagle," "The Last Patrol," "Official Judgment," and "The Judgment of His Peers." Quentin Roosevelt, *Quentin Roosevelt: A Sketch With Letters* (New York, C. Scribner's Sons, 1921), 282.

¹³ Now called the Theodore Roosevelt Association.

January 1919; even today, this association still has the objective of preserving Theodore Roosevelt's memory and legacy. At the end of the war, the organization first created a research library in New York to store the personal papers of Theodore Roosevelt and his family. As a result, the documents related to Quentin Roosevelt's life were circulating between multiple hands before they were arranged in the Houghton archives. Establishing the archive files was itself influenced by institutional and emotional logic related to the Roosevelts' family life. A large part of the documentary file about Quentin Roosevelt can be explained by the tragic context of his death and the large impact it had both in the United States and France. After his death, a large effort was made by his relatives to collect artefacts related to him, such as a lock of hair from when he was three,¹⁴ or the essays he wrote in elementary school that his former teacher found 47 years later, in 1955.¹⁵

One document can retrace the role that emotion had on the actors to keep, share and control artefacts about Quentin Roosevelt. Quentin was shot down across German lines; a letter sent by Captain F.W. Zinn of the Air Service to Edith Roosevelt in April 1919 describes how German authorities carefully assembled the personal effects on his body before cataloging them and sending them to the Roosevelt family after the war.¹⁶ Attached to Zinn's letter was a list detailing those objects. This list includes Quentin's watch, his wallet with some photos of his relatives, and his last letters carried during his final flight, all of which were stored until the end of the war in the central Berlin belongings deposit. The items served the family as memorabilia, holding a part of Quentin Roosevelt's experience and worthy of being cherished. A locket bearing his portrait can now be found in the archives of his fiancée, Flora Whitney.¹⁷ Quentin's family saved his dog tag (fig. 3), keeping it alongside the family service flag, the symbol of the four sons' commitment in the war.¹⁸

¹⁴ "Quentin's curl June 15 Saturday 1901 age 3 years 6 months 21 days," 1901, Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers, MS Am 2835 (402).

¹⁵ Essay written by Quentin Roosevelt regarding airships, 6th grade, 1908, Roosevelt family papers from the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, 1895–1939, 95M-29, Houghton Library, Harvard University, <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990091328460203941/catalog>.

¹⁶ Letter from Frederick Wilhelm Zinn to Edith Kermit Carow Roosevelt. Sagamore Hill National Historic Site. Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o276710>.

¹⁷ Tiffany and Company, Locket. Flora Whitney Miller papers relating to Quentin Roosevelt, MS Am 2925 (109), Houghton Library, Harvard University, <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990091328450203941/catalog>.

¹⁸ Some of the artefacts were recovered by the Sagamore Hill National Site; some others were scattered. Houghton Library keeps those left by the family in the Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers. Dog tag, circa 1917–1918, Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers, MS Am 2835 (405). Service flag, circa 1918, Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers, MS Am 2835 (412).



Figure 3. Quentin Roosevelt's dog tag, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Along with a pair of cufflinks, the same archival file contains another interesting item: half of a two-dollar gold coin sent by Quentin's close friend Hamilton Coolidge. Son of future president Calvin Coolidge, Hamilton was educated at the Groton School and then attended Harvard, just as Quentin did; both were also deployed as pilots during the war. As a token of friendship, Quentin and Hamilton broke the gold piece, each keeping half.¹⁹ This practice, called *sùmbolon* ("sign of recognition"), was a tradition in ancient Greece mentioned in Plato's *Symposium* and *Republic*. Relatives or close friends would keep half of a broken object; when they reconnected with each other, they could be sure of the other's identity if the fragments fit together.²⁰ While the *sùmbolon* symbolized the strongest bond between people in ancient Greece, in the United States at the start of the 20th century, it also signified the higher social status of those who had the cultural background to perform such an act and to perceive objects as important documentary evidence. This most-valued gift sent to Quentin Roosevelt's fiancée represented the years of friendship between the privileged young men. The other half of that gold piece is listed by the US Army in a revealing inventory of the personal belongings Quentin left in his camp before his last flight. Unfortunately, his effects were scattered and cannot be found in any archive. The gold coin thus signifies the importance Coolidge placed on

¹⁹ "My half of Quentin's two dollar gold piece," included with cuff links belonging to Hamilton Coolidge, 1913, Flora Whitney Miller papers relating to Quentin Roosevelt, MS Am 2925 (104).

²⁰ Étienne Helmer, "De quoi la monnaie est-elle la mesure?", *Cahiers d'économie Politique* 72, no. 1 (June 30, 2017): 19–20, doi:10.3917/cep.072.0007.

memorializing his friendship with Quentin, and the historical significance these small objects attained when consolidated into one archive.

Although the items have vanished from the archives, the inventory from the family archives at Houghton is still useful as it suggests more precisely some elements of Quentin Roosevelt's mood during his stay in France.²¹ One can understand based on this list of his belongings a little more about what he was like. In that list can be found the headlights and a tire inner tube for the motorcycle he used to ride to visit different parts of France and the Normant family, showing both his expertise in mechanics and his status in the army despite his young age. Quentin Roosevelt also had the kit of any good soldier: some chocolate bars, a trench mirror, a gun, and the *Soldier's Prayer Book*, this last which is now in the Theodore Roosevelt Collection. In that prayer book, Quentin inserted a personal prayer and a picture of Flora.

In his war letters sent to his father, Quentin regularly complained of long periods of expectancy and dullness that affected so many soldiers in the conflict. To manage that time, he asked for magazines and books. Some were sent by his family. Others he procured for himself in France. The list also shows that literature was important in Quentin's eyes: as a young boy he had already attempted writing some short stories and poems; moreover, he was fascinated by Romantic and fantastic French literature. At the Groton School and Harvard, Quentin first came to learn French and enjoy French literature, and the army inventory registered six books written in French (unfortunately not their titles). It also listed the fantastic story "La Peau de Chagrin" by Honoré de Balzac and a book probably written by Théophile Gautier, a fantastic and romantic author known for *Le Roman de la Momie*.²² The list, which includes *The Land of Heart's Desire* by William Butler Yeats (1894), and *Fifty-One Tales* by Lord Dunsany (1915), is precious as it confirmed the evolution of Quentin's personal tastes as a young adult. Theodore Roosevelt had a strong grip on his children's education and wished to teach them moral stories about the foundations of Europe and America. As a child, Quentin Roosevelt dove into the stories of the fireside poets.²³ His later education emancipated

²¹ Inventory of the effects of Quentin Roosevelt, July 18, 1918, Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers, MS Am 2835 (408).

²² The two French novels were published earlier (1831 and 1858) than the English titles, showing that Quentin Roosevelt had a keener knowledge of English literature than of French.

²³ In a letter sent in 1904, Theodore Roosevelt explained how he asked his children to learn by heart the tale of King Olaf and that he had read the story of Robin Hood to his youngest son Quentin. The tale of King Olaf is part of Henry W. Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863). Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Kermit Roosevelt, February 19, 1904, Theodore Roosevelt additional papers, MS Am 1541 (73), Houghton Library, Harvard University, <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990091328590203941/catalog>.

him from his father's educational hold, allowing him to read in French and explore fantastic literature in its mystery and darkness.

II: Quentin Roosevelt and the Normants of Romorantin, a Special French-American Relationship



Figure 4. First meeting with the Normant family. August 26, 1917.

Quentin Roosevelt first met the Normant family in 1917 (see fig. 4, above).²⁴ Paradoxically, the historian has access to very few mentions of this family in the Roosevelt archives during the time Quentin was in France. However, after he died the Normants assumed an important place in Flora Whitney and the Roosevelt family's mourning process. In the years following Quentin's death, Edithe Normant and Flora

²⁴ [Première rencontre, 1917], August 26, 1917. Flora Whitney Miller papers relating to Quentin Roosevelt, MS Am 2925 (99), 4.

wrote each other letters, which kept the memory of her lover alive.²⁵ Among the documents they exchanged, the photo album is particularly striking: the pictures it contained presented the daily events and chronology of Quentin's life in France with the Normants, aspects he had expressed in very few of his own letters.

The Normants were a rich and industrial family from the city of Romorantin in the north of Issoudun.²⁶ The family came up at the start of the 19th century when three brothers joined their energies to invest in the construction of two textile factories. The company rapidly flourished and, by the mid-19th century, were able to hire up to more than a thousand workers. At that time, the city of Romorantin became the first industrial site of the area. Alongside the economic activities of the company, the family rooted itself within the local notability. In 1889, Emile Benjamin Normant became the sole owner of the company after the death of his mother and his brothers. As mayor of the nearby village of Villeherviers from 1871 to 1911, Emile Normant developed the school founded by his family, in addition to a mutual insurance company and housing accommodations for his factory employees. He also enlarged the cultural tastes of his family, engaging the construction of a vast Neo-Renaissance style mansion. Completed in 1904, the house is where the family regularly hosted Quentin Roosevelt and his friend, Hamilton Coolidge. As revealed in the photo album, the huge and spacious house featured a white stone double staircase that gave access to the building's four floors.

The first encounter between the Normants and Quentin Roosevelt was an accident, a story documented in the photos gathered in the album sent by Edithe Normant years later. The first U.S. aeronautic camp was to be built at the end of summer 1917 in a field in Issoudun near the Normants' home. The village in itself was located on an ideal location: it was at the crossroads of the rails used to forward American troops and equipment from the Atlantic ports to the North East front. There, enjoying the heat of the end of August, the Normant family took a car ride by the American camp, possibly attracted by the curiousness of these newcomers.²⁷ On this day (August 26), the summer heat was perfect for taking a drive in a fancy convertible sedan and stopping to take photographs in their

²⁵ Letter to Flora Whitney, 1918–1919, Flora Whitney Miller papers relating to Quentin Roosevelt, MS Am 2925, box 2, folder 45.

²⁶ I wish to thank Laurent Leroy, who wrote a thesis in 2008 on the history of the family wealth of the Normant. His work can be read on his book and personal website. Laurent Leroy, "Normant Brothers Textile Factory in the 19th and 20th century." Accessed February 2, 2018, <http://www.histoirenormantromorantin.com/index.html>. Laurent Leroy, *Une entreprise et des hommes: aspects de l'histoire sociale de la manufacture de draps Normant à Romorantin (vers 1800-1969)*. Mémoire de Master de recherche en histoire contemporaine, Tours, June 2008.

²⁷ Story checked with Edithe Normant's letter to Ethel Derby, Quentin's sister, in French: "It was at this time of the year, three years ago, that luck led us to meet Quentin, by the side of the main road to Issoudun, where we stopped by car, and yesterday we wanted to walk again by this place, to see what remains of the huge camp after a year and a half of abandonment." August 15, 1920, Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers, MS Am 2835, box 42, folder 764.

Sunday outfits. But the heat might also have seized the motor of the Normant car on the small dusty road bordering the new American camp. Help came from American soldiers, especially Quentin Roosevelt, who had the mechanical skills to examine the car engine. In the center of the picture presented at the opening of the photo album, Quentin looks at the mechanics under the car's hood, the camera's perspective focused on the motor and its repairer (see fig. 5).²⁸ To thank him for the welcomed help, the Normants invited him and Hamilton Coolidge, who was also present on the scene, to have dinner at the family home. In a picture of that dinner, men and women posed in evening suits and elegant dresses with Quentin and Hamilton, who wore the uniform of the "Sammies," the French nickname for the U.S. troops.



Figure 5. Quentin Roosevelt (second from right) and others examine the motor of the Normant family car, August 26, 1917.

Attraction and mutual curiosity seem evident between the French and Americans in the whole album. This mutual curiosity also seemed sincere. A purchase order held by Houghton Library shows that in October 1917, Quentin bought two turquoise bars at

²⁸ [Dirt road with cars, trucks, soldiers and civilians, 1917 August?], 1917. Flora Whitney Miller papers relating to Quentin Roosevelt, MS Am 2925 (99), 3.

Tiffany and Co. in Paris for Marie-Anne Normant, the family's youngest daughter.²⁹ The relationship remained regular and close during the whole period, even when Quentin's duty led him on distant missions. During his trip to Arcachon to join the French aerial shooting camp of Cazaux, he received a postcard from the Normants. Each family member signed and wrote a few words, as did Hamilton Coolidge, who sent his kind regards from Romorantin.³⁰

The photos set in the album present a staging of Quentin's joyful moments in France. His activities with the Normant family, as shown in the pictures, appeared plentiful and diverse, and can easily be ordered by levels of intimacy. The most intimate were the domestic areas presented in the photos, which depict leisure time that helped the American pilots to integrate with the Normant family circle. Each pilot had his own bedroom with a worktable where they wrote their letters; this table represented the strongest link in the album between their location in France and their homeland. In the communal domestic spaces, people had meals, smoked pipes, exchanged their uniforms for civilian clothing, and had discussions that the archives do not recall.

Less intimate but still important was the local area, expanding to the town of Romorantin. The Sauldre river³¹ near the house had a singular place in this space, the photos showing how people used to sit and have lunch on its banks. At the end of May 1918, Quentin Roosevelt went swimming in the river with the family children. This picture showed how his friendship with the Normant family was not limited to formal meetings but extended to casual interactions with the youngest circle of the family. When activities took them away from Romorantin, they assumed a strongly cultural and touristic character. The family organized visits to the castles of Trécy and Chambord, which appear to be both Sunday excursions and cultural visits.

The pictures show a striking contrast between the young and athletic U.S. soldiers and the French civilians, who were mostly women, children, and old men, with young healthy men absent because they had departed for the war.³² Beginning in 1918, this difference became even clearer in the areas of France where the Americans were located. The number of American soldiers on French soil increased, creating a massive presence on

²⁹ The two bars cost 80 francs, equivalent to \$190.00 in 2019. Receipt of payment for jewels to Tiffany and Company, October 1917, Paris, Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers, MS Am 2835, box 18, folder 407.

³⁰ Postal card « Mardi », March 1918?, Roosevelt-Derby-Williams papers, MS Am 2835, box 18, folder 393.

³¹ The Sauldre is a river tributary of the Loire that passes Romorantin town.

³² Photos eight and nine, "On the roofs of the castle" ("Sur les toits du château"), September 23, 1917 and "The castle of Chambord" ("Le château de Chambord"), September 23, 1917, Photo album, Flora Whitney Miller papers relating to Quentin Roosevelt, MS Am 2925 (99).

the French back front³³. The strongest feelings between these new American incomers and the French civilians appeared alongside the transport roads and rail tracks near the U.S. military camps, such as the one in in Issoudun. At Saint-Nazaire, one of the ports of the Atlantic welcoming the American Expeditionary Forces, the camp housed 60,000 Americans in March 1918; Saint-Nazaire's population was only 40,000 at that time.³⁴ The American camp in Issoudun stationed a maximum of 8,000 American soldiers in a city with no more than 11,000 inhabitants.³⁵

The large American presence in these regions increased the contact they had with the local civilians and shaped an extensive communication between them. However, exchanges varied according to the social status of the groups, especially in the American army. Between American pilots, and more generally officers of the American Expeditionary Force, and the grand bourgeois French families, interactions grew both through specific contexts and among a strongly homogeneous social class. The Normant album serves as evidence of “castle breakdowns,” a practice of aircraft pilots.³⁶ This practice was linked to the unstable mechanics of the first plane engines, which sometimes necessitated pilots to land urgently in fields before the First World War, and was popularized during the First World War by the first American volunteers in the war of the LaFayette squadron. As practiced by American pilots, the goal of the castle breakdown was to fake a mechanical malfunction in order to land in the gardens of a nice property and enjoy the hospitality of French hosts (see fig. 6).³⁷

³³ André Kaspi, *Le Temps des Américains: Le Concours Américain à la France en 1917–1918* (Paris, Institut d'histoire des relations internationales contemporaines, 1976), 294.

³⁴ Hélène Harter, *Les États-Unis dans la Grande Guerre* (Paris, Tallandier, 2017), 250.

³⁵ Hiram Bingham, *An Explorer in the Air Service* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920), 118.

³⁶ “Castle breakdowns,” or, in French, “pannes de châteaux.” Robert B. Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2003), 22.

³⁷ Quentin Roosevelt with his plane, May 19, 1918. Flora Whitney Miller papers relating to Quentin Roosevelt, MS Am 2925 (99), 29.



Figure 6. Quentin Roosevelt with his plane, May 19, 1918.

The fame of being both Americans and pilots played largely in favor of the lucky airmen. The headquarters of the American air service eventually heard about these abuses and fought against such use of military equipment. Airships were particularly rare and precious in the army. Quentin Roosevelt wrote in a private letter to his fiancée that he himself was taught a lesson by his superior officer and dispossessed of his airplane in February 1918. From that moment he was forbidden to use his aircraft to join his friend Hamilton Coolidge at the Normants' property, and instead had to use his motorcycle to drive to the Normants during free days.³⁸

The castle breakdown was not practiced solely by Americans, but by the French as well: in May 1918, Hamilton Coolidge testified that "French pilots drop in on us more and more often."³⁹ Under the pretext of mechanical breakdown, French aviators would land near American camps to obtain chocolate, tobacco, and food, in which Americans were particularly well-furnished partly because of private organizations such as the YMCA. These material exchanges reinforced solidarity bonds among the armies.

³⁸ Letter from Quentin Roosevelt to Flora Whitney, February 23, 1918, Flora Whitney Miller papers relating to Quentin Roosevelt, MS Am 2925, box 3, folder 73.

³⁹ "The French pilots drop in on us more and more often." Letter from Hamilton Coolidge to Isabella S. Gardner, May 26, 1918, Isabella Stewart Gardner's WWI correspondence, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Similarities in social status, education, and scientific and literary knowledge were striking between the Anglo-Saxon officers drawn from American universities and the French local dignitaries. It is essential to remember that the meeting between Quentin Roosevelt and the Normant family occurred because of a car engine; at that time, mechanics were bolstered by a series of engineering developments in new means of transport: cars, motorcycles, and airplanes.⁴⁰ In these three modes of transport, Quentin and the Normants had a shared interest and experience, a cultural similarity on which the friendship was built.

While Quentin Roosevelt and the Normants were both from privileged upper classes, historians have shown that diversity of military and social configurations in the AEF did not diminish the power of cultural exchanges between French and Americans. For example, at the opposite end of the social spectrum, Afro-American servicemen, who faced discrimination in the army, were welcomed warmly by French retailers and villagers.⁴¹ The diversity of personal and social circumstances seemed to have reinforced the link between the Americans and French, because the singularity strengthened the bonds after war, either in the charities led by American philanthropists, in the American writers who transmitted their experience of France in their novels,⁴² or finally in the American practices that progressively settled down on French soil.⁴³ However, Quentin's experience in France was nevertheless exceptional.

It is thanks to the photo album that one can today understand the reasons for and the mechanics of this singular friendship between Quentin Roosevelt and the Normants. The album contains 32 photographs set in chronological order by Edith Normant to tell the story of the meeting, the social activities, and Quentin's life in the Normant house. In 1919, the family sent the collection in respect of Flora Whitney's mourning. The photos are medium-sized, 9.5 centimeters by 12 centimeters; some have been altered and blurred under the effects of time and light. The First World War was a time of rapid growth of amateur photography practices, with a proliferation of photo albums made sometimes by

⁴⁰ Quentin Roosevelt joined the Engineering Sciences course in his second undergraduate year at Harvard, testifying to his interest in mechanics by riding a motorcycle, an important skill for those who wanted to join the Air Service, as revealed in a letter from the War Department to Harvard president A. Lawrence Lowell, June 5, 1917, Records of the President of Harvard University, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, UAI 5.160, box 62, folder 178, Harvard University Archives, Harvard University, <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/ead/hua03003/catalog>.

⁴¹ André Kaspi, *Le Temps des Américains*, 302–304.

⁴² Most famous are Alan Seeger, Ernest Hemingway, and John Dos Passos. Tim Dayton, "American Literature & the First World War," *Against the Current* 31 n. 182, 2016: 30–34.

⁴³ The French movie company Pathé recorded in 1919 the first jazz album of Jim Europe's band, a jazz and ragtime band that landed with the 369th Afro-American infantry in December, 1917. Peter Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle: the Harlem Hellfighters' Struggle for Freedom in WWI and Equality at Home* (New York, Basic Civitas, 2009), 50.

the military on the front, and sometimes by French civilians on the home front. This practice was made possible by the advent of Kodak devices that brought on the market more precise obturators, simplified adjustments, and an enlarged mobility. Its less sophisticated corollary, the *Vestpocketkodac*,⁴⁴ also found wide success: its miniature and mobile engine allowed nearly instantaneous picture-taking not only in private spaces but in open spaces, as shown in the photos taken by the Normant family. The family admired modern technologies and was keen to buy this kind of photo device. It was used for special occasions but it does not seem that the Normants had, at the start of their relationship with Quentin, the idea to transform those images into an album. On the contrary, Quentin's death played an essential role in the object's creation. The album combined in that regard two temporalities: one of the moments the photos were taken, and one of the mourning of Quentin Roosevelt and its echo in personal and collective memories.

Conclusion: What the Artefacts Tell Us

The photo album created by Edithe Normant for Quentin's fiancée is one example of the material and progressive construction of American-French relationships. It is both evidence of his personal relationship with a French family and one representation of American-French relations on a national scale. This intimate relationship framed a symbolic setting for the collective memorialization of his death, which was marked by a shared emotion forged with the blood spilled for France by the son of an American president. At the same time, the album and other documents presented in this paper remind us of the importance of the materiality of archives, especially non-written objects. How these artefacts traveled in time, and how they were selected for the archive or scattered and lost, explain a lot about the complex path of their curation and the various narrative senses with which historians find themselves regularly in confrontation, and which they need to formalize.

⁴⁴ Jean-Claude Lemagny and André Rouille, *Histoire de la photographie* (Larousse, Paris, 1998), 81.