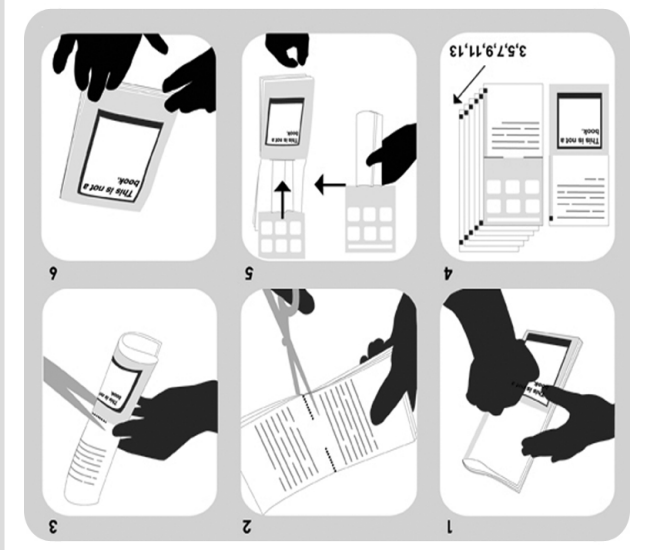




# The Ballad of Louis The Monkey (part 3)

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Originally made by a young child as a Christmas gift for her soldier father, Louis the Monkey existed briefly as a simple token of affection, a reminder of home, a dormant object carried tucked into the great coat of 2nd Lieutenant H.H. Allen, a young Hamiltonian who had been the janitor at 270 Sherman Avenue before the war. Allen met his end in the Battle of the Somme, in the summer of 1916. Having gone over the top to begin his advance up a gentle slope to take the high ground, Allen was caught in the murderous sweep of shell and machine gun fire pouring out of the German positions. Allen fell in No-Man's-Land, his body landing in the thick muck of the churned up field. Staring up at a sky choked with smoke, he felt for the little stuffed monkey that he had squeezed beneath his uniform, next to his heart. He could feel its gentle felt hands and with his dying breath heard the fading, plaintive voice of his daughter Annie's fiddle. Louise absorbed Allens soul and the monkey would spend his days searching for the daughter he left behind, eventually reuniting with her in Hamilton.

The ballad reproduced here provides the basic narrative, yet contains one significant



**TH&B** installation, Hamilton, Ontario, 2008

modification: Allen is referred to as a "private" not a 2nd Lieutenant. It is not clear why the balladeer made this alteration. It is possible that this change was made to conform to a preexisting narrative ballad that had been used as the basis for Allen's tale (a common practice). It could also be that the narrator felt that audiences would be more moved by Allen's story if he were of a lower rank, a revisionist approach consistent with other soldier ballads of the 1930s (see the Lilly Brothers' *Forgotten Soldier Boy* and/or *Where is My Soldier Boy* by the Cream Street Trio). Also of note is the rather awkward structure of the ballad that breaks from a standard chronological telling. This unorthodox approach is typical of a genre of balladeering known as the "drunken ramblers" who have a tendency to "scramble" the details while maintaining the essential elements. For more information on this obscure genre, see Roger Penny's groundbreaking study *Mad Ramblings and Drunken Yarns: A Post-Structuralist (Re)Reading of the Ballads of the Reverend Luke Murphy and his Followers* (Carter University Press, 1988).

The museological installation included in the recent **TH&B** exhibition documented at the end of

As Allen's body sank into the earth,  
Mixing blood and soil and chalk,  
The monkey emerged out of wound and wool,  
Allens soul made Louis stir and walk.

A long journey home over land and sea,  
Was the trial for Allen's soul.  
To return to the daughter he'd left behind,  
And prove that their love remained whole.

To the poor little Annie, sits upon the stoop  
Fiddling to her father's ghost.  
A sad little figure, a simple gift,  
To a soldiers soul he is now the host.

### -Anonymous

(Sung to the tune of *Banish Misfortune*)

this book, was located in a small space at in the old Cotton Factory (270 Sherman Avenue, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada) that I believe was Allen's storage room for janitorial supplies when he worked there before the war. In the small back room, beyond the half door, Private P.D. Mann (who served in France with Allen and may have been responsible for returning the monkey to Anne) found Allen's banjolin. That room is not currently accessible. In the installation, Mann could be heard reminiscing about his First World War experiences on a soundtrack compiled and mixed by David Poolman and Gord Glendon that included musical accompaniment by The Hunters.

Poor little Annie, sits upon the stoop,  
Fiddling to her fathers ghost.  
A sad little figure, a simple gift,  
To a soldiers soul, he is now the host.  
Private Allen hailed from Hamilton,  
Went to France to fight the Hun.  
He met his end on a bright summer day  
In the battle of the Somme.  
The mine blast signalled their advance,  
Up the hill at Beaumont Hammel.  
But young Allen never reached the ridge,  
No-Man's-Land is where he fell.  
A spray of bullets had raked the field,  
As Allen plodded through the muck.  
A hot shard of shrapnel, straight to his heart  
Ending his days of cursed luck.  
In his breast pocket, he'd carried a gift,  
Made by his daughter Anne.  
A sad, little monkey, made of scraps,  
Of canvas, felt and linen.

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