

Michigan's Civil War Battle Flags

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Introduction

By July 4, 1866, the great American Civil War had been over for more than year. At its close, the War Department had authorized Union regiments to return their regimental flags to the governors of their respective states. Now came the ceremony for the return of Michigan's flags--"one of the finest and most interesting displays ever witnessed in Michigan"--recalled Adjutant General John Robertson. For the occasion, Detroit was bedecked with banners, garlands, and streamers, and each store, home and public building vied for the most lavish decorations. Over 70,000 attended the grand affair--the first public celebration of the end of the war--and cheered the remnant regiments and the color bearers holding their "torn and smoke-begrimed battle flags in their hands." Few present could have missed the veneration cast upon these relics--second only to the men themselves and in some ways equal to human life--for the colors were visible reminders of lives that were no more and causes won at such a bitter cost. In accepting the flags from the regiments, Governor Crapo promised they would be preserved forever. "They will not be forgotten and their histories left unwritten," he declared.

These precious flags were borne through blood, death, defeat and victory. Many found courage in their folds. Today, deteriorated and fragile from battle damage and age, more than 160 Michigan Civil War battle flags are being preserved by the Bureau of Michigan History and by the Michigan Capitol Committee, the legislative-executive body charged with the oversight of the Capitol and its collections.

For over a century, some Michigan Civil War battle flags remained in private hands. Others were on display in the State Capitol, built just after the end of the war in part to enshrine them. With the restoration of the Capitol (1989 to 1992) came renewed interest in preserving and protecting the flags. Thus the history of these relics lies not only in the Civil War, but also in the different journeys that brought them home to Michigan, their histories after the war, and the challenge of the efforts to preserve them. People from all over Michigan and even the nation have "adopted" particular flags in the collection, contributing money and research for their preservation and research. This history chronicles not only the role the flags played in the Civil War but also a second kind of war—the battle not only to preserve the past, but also to understand and respect it. Thus these flags become a living exhibit, embodying their past but also the present.

Origins of the Civil War

State's rights and slavery were the twin issues that exploded the country into war. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 had opened the west to slavery by applying the concept of popular sovereignty: that is, the western territory would be open to slavery until the people who settled in those areas decided whether they wanted slavery or not. Anti-slavery voices rose to a fever pitch in opposition to this act. In Michigan "Free Democrats," "Free Soilers," and "Free Whigs" all opposed to this banded together and, "under the oaks" in 1854, the Republican Party was born in

Jackson. In the November elections of that year the Republican Party ran a full slate of candidates and emerged victorious--a huge departure in what had been a largely Democratic state. Two years later, Abraham Lincoln made his one and only appearance in Michigan at a rally in Kalamazoo.

Michigan was steeped in anti-slavery sentiment. It was a major outpost of the Underground Railway because of its proximity to Canada where slavery was outlawed and slaves could not be taken back by slaveholders. Michigan was settled in large part from New York state, where slavery was hotly opposed on moral and religious grounds. On the other hand, Michigan had few economic or social ties to the South: in fact, slavery represented a huge economic threat to states like Michigan, who feared the unfair competition represented by slave labor and who opposed the spread of slavery into the territories. As the limits of state's rights were argued and the issue of slavery seared the national conscience the overwhelming idea of union took hold as Americans argued with Americans as to where their loyalties lay. Slavery? State or country first?

Flags waved as symbols and inspiration as the North and South fell closer war. The first flag of American independence (a flag with thirteen stripes whose origin is clothed in a mix of historical fact and lore) probably flew over George Washington's headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1776. The following year the Continental Congress adopted a design of thirteen stripes with thirteen stars to show to all nations the right of the newborn nation to a place among them. Thus, the American flag from the start recognized the states yet asserted the union that bound them together. At first, both an additional stripe and star were added for new states, but that proved impractical. In 1818, Congress enacted a law that made the flag of the United States thirteen alternate red and white stripes and stipulated that a new star be added upon the admission of each new state. Thus the very appearance of the flag was bound up with core issues in the conflict between North and South--admission of states, the western territory, the growth of the country and the perpetuation of the Union.

In December 1860, South Carolina seceded, followed by six more states. The seven adopted their own flag of three stripes and seven stars. It was their deep belief that more would join the newly formed Confederate States of America. The Confederacy took over arms and munitions stored in old Federal repositories and busily recruited volunteers. The North, on the other hand, was equally determined that secession was unacceptable and that the South must rejoin the Union. Compromises were proposed--Samuel F.B. Morse suggested, for instance, an amiable separation, severing the flag (the blue canton vertically; the stripes horizontally) until the North and South could reconcile with equanimity.

Michigan and the War

By April 1861 the country's eyes were turned to Fort Sumter, built at the entrance of the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. The fort was held by the United States government, but the Confederacy had blocked efforts to bring in supplies and reinforcements. Surrounded and almost out of provisions, Major General Robert Anderson and 75 men refused the Confederate demand that he haul down his flag and surrender. In the early dawn of April 12, the Confederates fired upon the federal fort. After a 34-hour bombardment, Anderson surrendered to Brigadier General

Pierre Beauregard, one of Anderson's students at West Point. Anderson got permission to fire a final salute to the fort's 33-star United States flag. During the salute, explosions killed one gunner and five more men, one fatally. These casualties were the first of the Civil War and, like so many over the next four years, they centered around a flag.

Anger and excitement seized the land. Before the war, abolition was the question on every lip. Now that shots had been fired, the focus shifted. The very survival of the country—the Union—was in danger. The South had fired on the nation's flag, the paramount symbol of the Union. This was treason. The Fort Sumter flag was carried to New York by steamer where more than 100,000 people rallied around the shot-torn flag. Posters screamed "Our Country's Flag Has Been Insulted!" During the war, the flag would emerge as the talisman of the Union and the most sacred and powerful symbol of the war.

On April 15, only three days after the firing on Fort Sumter, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion of the Southern states. In Union states like Michigan, the prospect of war was met with wild jubilation and "war fever" swept the land. After all the waiting and failed compromises, war seemed an adventure to many. Bruce Catton described the prevailing attitude: "To thousands and thousands of young men it seemed the chance of a lifetime. War was all music and flags and cheering crowds. . . ." Whether they loved their country or yearned for adventure, Michigan responded instantly and enthusiastically to Lincoln's call for troops.

Under the able leadership of "War Governor" Austin Blair, Michigan moved quickly to provide training and equipment for eager volunteers. Lincoln had requested only one fully equipped regiment from Michigan, to serve for three months (less if the war ended sooner), but the state lacked funds even for this. Michigan's military budget in 1861 was only \$3,000 per year and estimations placed the amount needed to field a regiment at \$100,000. Private citizens, including Lewis Cass, James Valentine Campbell, Henry Baldwin, and many others rushed to loan the state whatever was necessary. Speed was of the essence. The legislature convened an extra session and authorized funds so that Michigan could answer Lincoln's call.

So eagerly did Michigan volunteer for service that the quota for the first regiment was quickly filled. Preference was given to members of the state militias, 28 loosely organized and ill-equipped companies scattered about the state. They had some military training, however, and their resolution and spirit served Michigan's early regiments well. Disappointed volunteers attempted to buy their way into a company or, failing this, left Michigan to volunteer in another state. Quickly mobilized, trained and equipped in Detroit, the mood was jubilant as the troops of the First Michigan Volunteer Infantry (Three Months) departed for war. When they arrived in Washington on May 16--one month and one day after Lincoln's call for volunteers--the threatened city received the regiment with parades and acclaim as a relieved president reportedly exclaimed, "Thank God for Michigan!" Michigan was the first state west of the Alleghenies to respond to his call.

The careless jubilation of the Union which predicted a short war and believed that the Confederacy would instantly fail was short-lived. The First Michigan Infantry soon saw action at the disastrous Battle of Bull Run on July 21, 1861. It was the First Michigan's only real battle. It

was a decisive loss for the Union. The regiment's colonel and battle flag were captured and 113 men were counted as casualties.

Back home enthusiasm and determination had not abated, although now there were fewer illusions. "*We are coming, Father Abraham!*" ran the lines of a popular refrain of the day. Further quotas were set and recruiting began to pump regiment after regiment into the field, with recruits now volunteering for three years. The legislature authorized more funds and patriotic citizens provided cash bonuses. "*Six hundred thousand loyal men and true have gone before--we are coming Father Abraham--three hundred thousand more!*" Michigan more than met her quota. By war's end she had sent more than 90,000 men—one of the highest per capita responses of any Union state. Volunteers were organized into thirty-one regiments of infantry, eleven regiments of cavalry, and one regiment each of light artillery, engineers and mechanics, and sharpshooters.

This was an incredible commitment for a state whose total population in 1861 was well under one million. It has been estimated that over the four years of the war 23% of the male population of Michigan--representing over half of the males of military age--took up arms in defense of the Union. As Lincoln turned increasingly to the states for men and materials, Michigan stepped up her efforts. Governor Blair turned to the state's leading citizens, many of them men of influence and substance, some of them men with military experience, and asked them to "raise a regiment."

For the infantry, the regiment was the fighting unit of the war. Made up of one thousand men and officers, each regiment was divided into ten companies of about 100 men each. Recruiting was done locally, with most regiments drawn from particular districts within the state. Whole companies might be filled by men who knew or were related to each other, men who came from neighboring small villages or rural areas. A major town or city within the recruiting district served as the mustering-in point. Camp was set up on the outskirts of town, and it was here that recruits were trained and equipped. The strong identification of regiments with particular communities gave rise to a degree of rivalry. It became a point of great pride as each community vied to make sure its regiment left for the battlefield as well-equipped and as well-spiced as any other—if not better.

As the regiment rushed to complete its organization and fill its ranks, raw recruits were drilled, uniforms and equipment were procured, and plans were laid for a final, farewell ceremony to mark its departure for the battlefield. These moving events, well-reported in newspaper accounts of the day, were the culmination of all the weeks or months of preparations. Families, friends and neighbors came for miles around to bid their boys good-bye. Typically, the whole regiment was drawn up in full uniform on the parade ground; bands played; patriotic speeches were delivered by local and state officials--sometimes Governor Blair himself or U.S. Senator Zachariah Chandler--but always the high point of the ceremony was the presentation to the regiment of its stand of colors. These were the flags under which the men would march into battle; the flags they would rally around; the flags they would die for; and the flags whose fortunes and fates would be linked to theirs forever.

The Battle Flags

By regulation, every regiment was to be issued a stand of colors, consisting of two flags: a national (the familiar "Stars and Stripes") and a regimental (similar to the state flag except the state coat-of-arms was usually replaced by the federal coat-of-arms, its outstretched eagle a powerful symbol of the Union the regiment was fighting to preserve). Measuring six and one half feet by six feet and borne on ten foot staffs, bearing the regiment's name emblazoned in gold, and made of brilliant silk fringed and tasseled with gold, these huge banners were designed to be easily seen and instantly recognized by every man of the regiment.

Taken together, these two flags were the official battle flags of the regiment. In general, individual companies within the infantry regiments did not carry flags. There were, of course, many other flags in use during the Civil War: camp colors; flank and other guide markers; and designating flags, used to identify corps, division and brigade headquarters. But none would come close to matching the importance of the regiment's official battle flags: its stand of colors.

Although most battle flags were commercially made by companies contracted by the War Department, communities often made sure that "their" regiment's flags were special--personalized tokens which expressed their high esteem--and high expectations. Some communities took up subscriptions so that expensive presentation flags could be ordered, perhaps complete with gold bullion fringe and finials topped with gilded eagles. The *Three Rivers Reporter* announced in October 1861 that a meeting, sponsored by the Ladies Soldier's Aid Society, was to be held in Three Rivers to "aid in purchasing a flag for the St. Joseph County Regiment" (the 11th Michigan Infantry). An admission of ten cents--or upwards--was collected at the door. "Patriotic songs will be sung and a grand time is anticipated. Citizens from all parts of the country are cordially invited to attend." Money was to be raised from subscriptions from all the villages of the county, but apparently some rivalry broke out between communities. The newspaper had to assure the citizens of Centreville that no attempt was being made to make people think that "the citizens of Three Rivers deserve all the credit for raising the means to obtain the Flag." The final cost of the flag was \$78.00. On November 26, 1861, while in camp at White Pigeon, the Ladies of St. Joseph County presented this "splendid banner" to Colonel May of the regiment. Ordered from A.F. Buhl and Company of Detroit, it featured a "staff mounted with a bronze globe on which is perched a hovering eagle." "A more tasty stand of colors," enthused the *Reporter*, "has not fallen to the hands of many soldiers in the war."

Frequently flags were presented to the regiment by the women of the community, who often raised the money for their purchase. Sometimes commercial flags were embellished by skilled local needle women, who personalized the flags and added embroidered mottoes. In other cases, mottoes were painted in gold: "Michigan's Daughters to Her Sons--Defend It;" "Presented by the Ladies of Coldwater;" "Do Your Duty;" "From the Ladies of Monroe;" "Fear Not Death--Fear Dishonor." As the colonel of the regiment accepted the flags from the hands of the ladies who presented them, cheer after cheer met his solemn pledge that they would never be dishonored. It was a pledge the regiment took with deadly solemnity, for the men were expected to defend their flags--and their honor--with their lives.

In fact, flags served a dual purpose. The first was functional. The color company, charged with the primary responsibility for the flags, had the duty of guarding and carrying them into battle. Color bearers were selected for their military bearing, their exemplary moral character—and their bravery. The color company was placed in the center of the battle line and set the pace and direction of the regiment, with hundreds of men "guiding on the colors." During the noise, confusion and smoke of battle, the flags were in the thick of the action. Men caught up in the melee looked to their colors to maintain their position and to prevent becoming separated from their regiment. Thus, the size and brilliance of the flags is easily understood: they had to be highly visible and instantly identifiable.

Held aloft where all could see them, flags rallied the regiment in moments of confusion and despair and infused them with renewed determination. Their importance in this regard was not lost on the public. George F. Root's 1861 song, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, was immensely popular on the battlefield and at home:

Yes, we'll rally round the flag, boys, we'll rally once again,
Shouting the battle cry of Freedom;
We will rally from the hillside, we'll gather from the plain,
Shouting the battle cry of Freedom.

The Union forever, hurrah, boys, hurrah!
Down with the traitor, up with the star;
While we rally round the flag, boys, rally once again,
Shouting the battle cry of Freedom.

The flag's second purpose, however, ran far deeper. Flags had become potent symbols everywhere. Songs and poetry featuring the flag abounded. It was on the battlefield, however, that flags achieved their greatest symbolic power, the embodiment of convictions so strong that men—young and old and from every walk of life—were ready to die for them. In states like Michigan, volunteers were determined to save the Union and abolish slavery, to defend their honor and the honor of their regiments. The identification of regimental flags with these convictions was complete. This was quickly reflected in the terrible ferocity surrounding the flags in battle and in the great acts heroism with which they were defended.

Both the functional and symbolic importance of the flags during the Civil War—and the great emotional significance they quickly assumed—is clearly reflected in our best sources of information about them: letters, diaries, accounts by newspaper reporters traveling with the regiments in the field and, after the war, regimental histories and reminiscences written by veterans. In account after account, in letters home and newspaper stories from the front, men told of their love and reverence for their flags, which had quickly become the most powerful talismans of the war and whose preservation was placed before their own. Major Willard Eaton of Otsego fought with the 13th Michigan Infantry Regiment. After the battle of Chickamauga in 1863, he wrote to his niece back home; "You speak of guarding the flag. Now I am aware that thousands of people have but little thought about a flag, or that it is of any importance. Let such take the field and go forth to battle under a flag and bear it through the storm of death until half

their number have fallen under its folds and then they will be prepared to appreciate it.” Eaton was killed in action at Bentonville, North Carolina in 1865.

Sadly, few photographs record battle flags in the field. The difficulty of capturing images of flags--which were almost always in motion--using the photographic technology of the day undoubtedly contributed to this scarcity. Most photographs were taken in field camp, with flags hanging limply, unfurled from their staves with few identifying details visible.

If anything, the importance of the flags only intensified as the war wore on. Regimental flags were intended to be easily seen on the battlefield, and they were—to friend and foe alike. Both Union and Confederate flags became instant targets of fierce enemy fire as each side realized that the simplest way to demoralize and disorient an opposing regiment was to shoot down its flag—or the person carrying it. It is no wonder that the greatest casualties of the war--both north and south--were suffered by those who carried the flags in battle. It was not unusual for a flag to be shot to tatters in a single engagement, its staff struck and shattered, and bearer after bearer killed or wounded. Every member of the color company—and, indeed, every member of the regiment--was expected to sacrifice his life, if necessary, to prevent the loss of the regiment’s flags in battle. Almost unimaginable acts of heroism were associated with their defense.

The loss of a flag to the enemy meant humiliation and disgrace for the regiment. Conversely, capturing an enemy flag brought honor and fame. In fact, while the Congressional Medal of Honor was instituted during the Civil War to reward acts of extreme bravery, the surest way to win one was by the capture of an enemy flag. Eventually, 69 Michigan men received the medal for various acts of bravery, but most were awarded through petition long after the war was over. Of the thirteen who received the medal during the war, all were for the capture of an enemy flag. A deadly contest quickly developed, with each side trying to kill the other’s color bearers and, if possible, capture their flags.

Adding further to their symbolic and emotional power, flags became visual records of the regiments which carried them. If a regiment acquitted itself with particular distinction in a major engagement—not merely a minor skirmish—then it was awarded the right to add the name of the battle to its flags. Such “battle honors,” as they were called, were painted directly on the flags. Regiments took great pride in their hard-earned honors and in the flags which bore them. In a very real sense flags were becoming part of the historical record of the war.

The war was recorded on flags in another way. Dirt and smoke and blood and bullet holes left indelible histories of their own. So fierce was the fighting around the flags that no single stand of colors survived the war intact. Instead, flags were often reduced to tatters during a single engagement in a matter of minutes. Regiments were proudest of these tattered flags, which bore, said the men who fought under them, “mute testimony” to their bravery, their triumphs, their suffering and their tragic losses. No matter how tattered and war-torn they became, and even without honors or mottoes, every man instantly recognized his regiment’s flags--and carried their memory forever.

But severely damaged, war-torn flags could no longer direct the movements of regiments in the field or rally men in battle, so periodically it became necessary to replace them. How often

depended upon circumstances and length of service, but a regiment might eventually carry two, three or even more stands of colors over the course of the war. Regiments reluctantly sent their old beloved colors home, to be preserved against their return. Lieutenant Henry Beach of the First Michigan Cavalry, upon sending home a standard of the regiment in 1864, wrote: "Gentlemen, I have the honor to forward to you the tattered standard of our regiment. Where, when and how well we have defended it we will let the history of the war tell. It has waved over many a bloody field, and been pierced by canister and rifle shot. Yet we trust we have never forsaken or dishonored it. Sirs, we venerate, we almost worship it, and confiding it to your care we humbly pray you will preserve it as long as the Peninsular State has a place and a name in the nation."

As Michigan soldiers marched and fought and died, their families and friends on the home front prayed, worried, wrote letters and sent packages. Back home, "the old flags" returned from the battlefield were often placed on public display in the communities where they had been presented with such optimism only a short time before. People came from miles around to view the pitiful remains of the once-brilliant banners, which served as silent testimony to the brutality of the war. On April 11, 1863, the *Flint Wolverine Citizen* reported: "Suspended in the store of H.C. Walker and Co. of this city, may be seen what remains of the once beautiful embroidered and gilded stand of regimental colors, presented by our citizens to the 8th Regiment of Michigan Infantry. Its brightness now is all bedimmed with the smoke and grime of battle; its fairness stained with blood; its rich fabric rent and pierced by the iron hail of contending armies; yet worn and tattered as it looks, it is far more precious now than when first its resplendent stars and stripes in their unsullied luster were flung open to the breeze. Then, it was but a fine and costly specimen of manufacturing test and skill; now, it is a memento of the gallant deeds of brave men, who bore it aloft proudly in the battle's van, flaunting it defiantly in the face of Treason and Death. Some of those who fought beneath its much loved folds are sleeping in the patriot's grave."

As Detroit mayor M.I. Mills would later say, the flags had become "mournful relics and mementos of our cruel and bloody strife," and their power to rally the folks at home equaled their power in the field: war-torn battle flags were displayed at the 1864 State Sanitary Fair in Kalamazoo as Michigan women raised money for sick and wounded soldiers "who have gone forth in defense of that flag which is the symbol of Union, and whose brave hearts nerve them to meet suffering and death rather than permit one star to be stricken from its azure field." "No objects in the Fair seemed to excite so much interest and fix the attention of the thousands who visited the Sanitary Hall," noted Adjutant General Robertson, "as the torn and battle scarred banners which had been borne by the regiments of Michigan during the war. As the multitude gazed on these silent emblems of the brave deeds of the men of Michigan, again and again was heard from mother and father the exclamation 'My son fought under that banner!' and not infrequently the sad, accompanying remark, 'he fell in battle,' or 'died in hospital.'"

New flags were requested to replace the old ones. Sometimes these were merely requisitioned from military stores, while on other occasions the community rallied to provide their regiment with replacements to equal the originals. This was banner news back home. On October 7, 1863, the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* carried this plea from the 24th Michigan Infantry Regiment, which had recently come through the devastation of Gettysburg, where they had endured among

the highest casualties of any Union regiment: "A Flag Wanted: We desire to call the attention of the many friends of the 24th to the fact that we are sadly in need of a flag, having now only the state banner, which is much worn and gives palpable evidence of hard service, and yet has had careful usage. Cannot our friends in Wayne County, by a concert of action get up for our regiment a suitable flag--as I intimated, the old one is worn out, full of bullet holes, and staff splintered and spliced. *We want 'a flag as is a flag,'* worth not less than \$500--nothing else will do. This may seem a large sum to spend for a flag, but there should be no difficulty in raising that amount, and even more, among the friends at home, for whom we are enduring fatiguing marches, hard fighting and everything incident to the life of a soldier in the field. Have we not earned it? Do we not deserve it? Then why not give us a splendid, heavy, blue silk flag, embroidered eagle, and etc.; but we leave the matter in the hands of those who will do the thing 'up brown.'" However acquired, replacement flags were almost as revered and just as vigorously defended. Some were apparently hurried into service so quickly that they never received their painted regimental designations, but it seems to have made no difference.

For the Union, the first years of the war held deepest setbacks with not only repeated and unexpected defeats but the common miseries of war--weather, weariness, the diminishing meaning of life. Bad timing, bad supplies and stubborn unseeing leadership caused the Union soldiers to walk into a military trap at Fredericksburg in December 1862 with a huge loss of life. After this loss, Winifred Lee Brent of Detroit, later wife of eminent Civil War surgeon and physician Henry F. Lyster, wrote "Michigan, My Michigan," as the sad news of Fredericksburg came to her home state: "Beneath a hostile southern sky/They bore thy banner proud and high/Ready to fight but never fly, Michigan, My Michigan." This song, whose verses chronicle other dramatic and heartfelt moments of Michigan's troops, was sung throughout the war and emerged as the closest Michigan has ever come to an official state song.

Gettysburg in July 1863 was the turning point of the war for it thwarted Lee's fateful decision to invade the North. The three days of extraordinary death and destruction, the high moments of drama, particularly at beginning and end, and Lincoln's inexpressibly moving Gettysburg Address have come to symbolize the war as a whole. Right after Gettysburg came the fall of Vicksburg and the entire Mississippi Valley was free of Confederate troops. Later, during the last phase of the war, the Union fought on the offensive on all fronts. Particularly damaging to the Confederacy was the siege of strategically located Petersburg, Virginia, beginning in June 1864. Petersburg's fall would mean that Richmond, the Confederate capital, would likely follow. On April 3, 1865, Petersburg did fall. Of all the forces at Petersburg who wanted the honor of being first into the city, it was a Michigan regiment, the First Michigan Sharpshooters, which won it, and their ragged banner was the first Union flag raised over the city. Only a few minutes later, a second flag was raised over the city. Remarkably, it was also the flag of a Michigan regiment--the Second Michigan Infantry Regiment. The sight of the Sharpshooter's flag was the signal everyone had been waiting for. The war was essentially over.

The end of the "cruel and bloody strife" came on April 9 when Lee's army surrendered to Grant at Appomattox. Lincoln had often referred to the great forces underlying the war: "The nation's condition is not what either party or any man devised or expected. God alone can claim it." Thus a most tragic irony came when the man who had labored so mightily to find meaning in the carnage was assassinated on April 14. Even then, Michigan men were there: members of the 24th

Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment, which had suffered so at Gettysburg, was asked to form part of the military escort accompanying Lincoln's body back home to Springfield, Illinois for burial.

Six weeks later, on May 25, 1866, a huge Grand Review was held in Washington, D.C., and Union armies marched in victory behind their battle-scarred flags amid wild celebration. It was one of the greatest military exhibitions in American history: after a grueling trek to reach Washington, more than 150,000 men and 25,000 horses passed in review down the avenues of the capitol city. Walt Whitman, a witness to the event, wrote in his diary: "Two hundred thousand men over two days marched: the returning armies, with war-worn men marching twenty or twenty-five abreast all day long." Most eloquent of all were the battle flags under which each regiment marched. Riddled and torn, many were little more than bare flagstaves with tattered shreds still clinging to them. "Hour after hour," recorded Whitman, "the old infantry regiments, the men all sunburnt, nearly every one with some old tatter all in shreds that *had been* a costly and beautiful flag." Many in the crowd wept openly as the flags passed by.

"My Dear Brother and Sister," wrote Sylvanus Bachelder of the 14th Michigan Veteran Volunteer Infantry, "Here we are at the Capitol of the United States. After a march of over two thousand miles, we have brought up here. The Grand Review was a splendid affair. It was estimated that at least seventy five thousand people were present from a distance. As the troops marched down Pennsylvania Avenue, the steady tread of the men on the hard pavement told unmistakably (sic) that the men were doing their best. O it was a splendid sight. As far as you could see down the Avenue was one Sea of Blue Coats, their Burnished Rifles gleaming in the Sun. How the Blood prickled in my veins as I witnessed the patriotic feeling which Seemed to pervade the people. Everywhere, all seemed to enjoy the advent of Shermans army among them. When my company passed the Reviewing Stand, General Sherman and Lady presented us with a Beautiful wreath of flowers for our flag. Our flag is one we brought from Michigan with us and has been shot and torn till what remains will hardly hold together. Regiments that carry such flags it is good evidence that have Seen hard Service. Consequently, we came in for our full share of the honors. One citizen was heard to say if he had a piece of our old flag he wouldn't take a hundred dollars for it. Another said he wished a piece would drop off so he could get it. Hurahs and claping (sic) of hands greeted us all along our line of march."

This was not the only Michigan flag to excite admiration and attention. As George Stone of the First Michigan Sharpshooters remembered, "At the close of the Civil War the regiment was marching down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, and as they passed the grand stand in front of the White House, the President, Cabinet, and General Grant were sitting on the reviewing stand. The secretary of war noticed the old flag, all tattered and torn by shot and shell and the elements. He was told that it was the first Union flag to float over Petersburg, Virginia. He issued an order to our regimental commander to have printed on silk ribbon some of the prominent battles the regiment was engaged in and attach them to the flag staff, which was done." It is believed that this is the first--or at least one of the first--instances in which battle honors were painted on ribbons which were then attached to a flag. By the Spanish-American War, the custom of attaching battle ribbons had become commonplace and replaced the former custom of painting or embroidering honors directly on the flag.

From June 1865 to June 1866, regiments were discharged and soldiers made their way back home to Michigan. The War Department had issued General Order No. 94 in May 1865, directing regiments to turn over their colors to their chief mustering officers as they returned to their states. On June 13, 1865, the War Department authorized these officers to forward the colors to their governors. Accordingly, on June 19, 1866, Major John Knight of Detroit, noting that all of the Michigan regiments had been mustered out, delivered the flags then in his possession to the state's Adjutant General, Brigadier General John Robertson. Accompanying an inventory of the flags was this charge:

“By depositing these flags in the archives of each State, the authorities of the Government have placed therein a monument in memory of its glories which will be most cherished, and whenever beheld by the people will far surpass, in the feeling of veneration which they will call forth, all the pillars of marble or granite which human genius could build. It will be remembered that they have passed through scenes of strife, and that they have been carried by the hands of brave men themselves . . . on them is inscribed the names of the battles passed through, where the fate of liberty was staked and decided, *and with what feelings of reverence will these strips of bunting be looked upon by the father, mother, brother or sister, whose son or brother marched to victory or death under its folds.*”

Robertson added that the colors were--next to the men themselves who fought under and for them--the most important mementos of the war. “They are so indelibly stamped on the hearts of the people, the most forcible mementos of the gallant regiments that so heroically stood by them and the country, even in the blackest days of the war. To bear them aloft was a signal for rebel bullets, often bringing swift and certain death, but they were never trailed in the dust nor lacked a gallant bearer.”

But it would not be enough to merely turn the flags over to the governor. Michigan would mark the occasion and celebrate the end of the war at the same time. The Fourth of July, 1866 was selected: it was, of course, no accident that it was also the nation's birthday. Governor Crapo issued an invitation to all who had fought in the war in Michigan organizations (and been discharged honorably) to march behind their banners one last time, and then formally present them to the state. Participants were encouraged but not required to wear their uniforms. “It is presumed,” noted the *Wolverine Citizen* in June 1866, “that some colors may be in the hands of individuals throughout the State, and as it is desirable that they should all be in their proper places on that day, it is respectfully suggested that persons having them in charge should send them to this office prior to that time.”

The invitation was enthusiastically accepted. Newspapers advertised special half fares for veterans coming to Detroit by rail. Headlines in the *Detroit Free Press* of July 2, 1866 declared, “Grand State Celebration at Detroit! Presentation of the Various REGIMENTAL COLORS. Grand Monster Banquet to be Given By The Citizens to the Soldiers!” Monumental triumphal arches, decorated with evergreens, bunting, flags and mottoes, were constructed over the line of march. Storefronts, public buildings, and private homes were covered in bunting and bore likenesses of Michigan heroes. Flags flew everywhere. Bands played. Marchers included not only Michigan regiments and their battle flags, but virtually every other organization in the city, including the Masons, the Knights Templar, the mayor and city council, hose carts and hook and

ladder wagons bedecked with flags and evergreens, even the Typographical Union, whose cart was decorated in red, white and blue and bore an operating hand printing press. When the parade began, the city's bells pealed forth and streamers and flowers showered down on the veterans from every window, full of waving handkerchiefs and flags. Carriages with the wounded and disabled followed the regiments, and these were followed by express company wagons, elaborately decorated and drawn by spirited horses. One wagon was surmounted by an arch under which stood a lady, robed in the national colors and wearing a tiara of stars. Upon the arch was inscribed: "Not a star dimmed nor a stripe erased." "The Grandest Celebration Ever Witnessed in Detroit!" exulted the next issue of the *Free Press*, "70,000 People In Attendance!"

As gala as the event was, no one forgot for a moment the somber meaning underlying it. At its center was the presentation of the regimental flags. A grandstand was set up in the Campus Martius--the scene not so many years ago of the very first presentation of a battle flag to a Michigan regiment, the First Michigan Volunteer Infantry (3 months). And, since his was the first regiment to leave for the field, Major General O.B. Willcox, then colonel of the First, was chosen to present the flags to Governor Crapo on behalf of all the regiments. The *Detroit Free Press* reported the scene:

"About half-past twelve o'clock the advance guard of the great procession filed into the grounds in front of the grand stand. They were arranged in line in front of the stand by the marshals. The vacant space was soon filled up, and as the color-bearers came in and presented their torn and tattered banners at the front the scene was a striking one. The entire front of the stand was occupied by the standard-bearers and behind them stood the brave boys who had followed the colors, and now stood for the last time beneath their tattered folds.

Of the impressive scene presented, when the color-bearers of three score and ten organizations which the Peninsular State sent in the field stood before the assembled authorities of the State, supported by their comrades in arms and surrounded by thousands of their fellow citizens, holding those torn and smoke grimed battle flags in their hands, no true or faithful picture can be given. Rough, stalwart sturdy men were there . . . but there were others, worn and thin and wounded, scars marked their limbs and bodies, and a few whose empty sleeve hung limp and lifeless as did once the arm that fell shattered by shell and bullet, and some of these proudly bore the tattered banners in their remaining hand."

125 battle flags were returned to the state on that hot July day. In presenting them to Governor Crapo, General Willcox said, "Of all these flags there is scarcely one which has not waved in the thickest of the fight; scarcely a color which has not seen its heroic bearers one after another struck down in battle. Ah, yes! many a hand that vigorously grasped these flagstuffs and led the van now lies crumbling in the grave; and not color-bearers alone but nearly 15,000 others who fought beside them--the flower of Michigan--return not to receive your thanks and the plaudits of their grateful countrymen. . . We have tried to do our duty. . . It only remains for me, in the name of the Michigan soldiers, to surrender to the State these flags, tattered but not stained, emblems of a war that is past. We shall ever retain our pride in their glorious associations, as well our love for old Peninsular State." In receiving the flags on behalf of Michigan, Governor Crapo pledged they would stand as monuments to all that Michigan regiments had sacrificed. "Let us, then,

tenderly deposit them, as sacred relics, in the archives of our State, there to stand forever, her proudest possession. *They will not be forgotten and their histories left unwritten*”(emphasis added).

General Morrow, late the colonel of the 24th Michigan Infantry, was brought forward amid great applause and spoke a few words, following them with a “proposal for three cheers for Mrs. Brent, the soldier’s friend,” which were heartily given. Reverend George Duffield concluded the ceremony with a benediction, after which the soldiers retired to the Michigan Central freight depot shed, elaborately decorated for the occasion, where long tables--crowded with “every variety of good, substantial and luxurious food”--were set up to feed 5,000 people at one sitting.

The Civil War was the defining event of the century. In a very direct way it had affected every single person in Michigan as well as every state institution. It had affected industry, business, medicine, law, labor, music, religion, education, the role of women, and much more. Many of the recent heroes of the war would now become the state’s civic, business and political leaders. But, although it seemed to most that the war in all its devastation could never be forgotten, there were others who recognized from the first that memory would fade unless action was taken to prevent it.

The Flags and the Capitol

By the time of the 1866 flag ceremony, Detroit had long ceased to serve as the seat of Michigan state government. Lansing had unexpectedly become the capital in 1847, but its hastily-built statehouse was a small wooden affair intended to serve temporarily until a permanent building could be constructed. Despite the real and constant danger of fire in the wooden firetrap, the state seemed in no hurry to undertake such an expense, particularly not during the years when every penny was needed for the war effort. After the war, despite the very natural desire of veterans to display the flags in the capitol where they could be seen by all and serve as constant reminders of Michigan in the war, the threat of fire and cramped quarters meant that the collection of 125 large, fragile and very flammable flags had to remain in Detroit where the Adjutant General, John Robertson, maintained his offices. The loss of the flags to fire after all the sacrifices to preserve them on the field of battle would have made mockery of Governor Crapo’s pledge and represented the greatest possible insult to the veterans who had (in some cases reluctantly) entrusted them to the state’s care.

The desire to provide a suitable, dignified, permanent--and fireproof--shrine for the battle flags and other Civil War memorabilia lent great weight to the argument for the construction of a new capitol. Accordingly, on January 4, 1871, Governor Baldwin used the occasion of his message to the legislature to call for a new building: “The present and growing incapacity of the State buildings, the insecurity from fire. . . .are, in my judgment, adequate reasons why immediate action should be taken to erect a new State House. . . .“

Governor Baldwin’s plea bore fruit. In 1872--only a few years after the end of the Civil War--Michigan finally began construction on a new state capitol. Much about this building would reflect Michigan’s recent experience in the war. Even its most notable architectural feature, its dome, was a direct result of this experience. President Lincoln, criticized for allowing

construction to proceed on a monumental cast iron dome for the capitol in Washington at a time when the nation was at war, ordered the work to continue as a symbol of his faith in the Union. Thousands of Michigan volunteers encamped in Washington during the war saw the huge dome under construction. For them, the dome became a powerful symbol of the country they were fighting to save.

In November 1878, shortly before the dedication of the new capitol, the Reverend George Duffield, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Lansing, delivered a Thanksgiving sermon, "The New Capitol; or The Wilderness Rejoicing," in praise of the building and its importance to the state. Reverend Duffield had been greatly involved in the Civil War. He was the father of William W. Duffield, colonel of the 9th Michigan Infantry. At Fort Wayne on October 23, 1861, Reverend Duffield had presented a silk battle flag to his son's regiment. Inscribed on the flag was this motto: "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. In the name of God we will set up our banners." In his sermon, Reverend Duffield recounted how in late 1864--"the very midnight of the slave-holder's rebellion," as he put it--he had found himself in Washington. "As I approached the Capitol," he continued, "as if in sympathy with the signs of the times, it was shrouded in deepest gloom, so that it was scarcely visible even from the very gates. Presently there was a rift in the shifting shadows, and I caught sight for the first time of the new dome--in all its towering height, its immense proportions, its sublime magnificence. . . .As if in utter defiance of rebellion and laughing treason to scorn, and daring their united power to do its worst, the mighty symbol of our national authority was steadily advancing to completion. . . Then as never before I felt that my first loyalty was to THAT DOME--to that dome in the mighty shadow of which all other domes could safely rest. Yes! It was worth all the blood it cost to save it."

It was no accident, therefore, that the Michigan State Capitol, built in the very shadow of the war, should take as its inspiration and model this potent symbol of the Union. Its successful use in Michigan would establish the domed capitol as the very embodiment of the American form of democratic governance and set the standard for virtually every other state capitol for decades to come. It was also no accident that "over fifty of the torn old battle-begrimed flags carried by Michigan regiments in our late war were floating from the posts around the speaker's platform" at the ceremonies for the laying of the new capitol's cornerstone on October 2, 1873. "The flag taken at the surrender of Jeff Davis was displayed at the entrance of the speaker's stand" (Cassopolis Vigilant, October 9, 1873).

And it was no accident that one of the most important features of the new capitol was a Military Museum, conspicuously located on the first floor, in which, noted Adjutant General John Robertson in his 1882 *Michigan In The War*, were enshrined Michigan's battle flags "properly placed in regimental order in a magnificent vertical case of large dimensions reaching almost to the ceiling, superbly mounted with heavy plate glass, which, coupled with the bullet marked and battle worn flags, is the grandest and most impressive monument to the soldiers of Michigan."

Robertson, whose offices as Adjutant General were part of the suite which included the Military Museum, was a witness to the dedication of the new capitol on January 1, 1879. With great satisfaction he noted that the dedication, attended by thousands of people who packed the capitol to attend the ceremony and visit the new building, also marked the opening of the Military

Museum to the public. He watched as throngs of people pressed into the museum in the south wing of the first floor to view the tattered remains of the regimental flags. As he viewed the faces of the fathers, mothers, wives, sisters, brothers, sons and daughters of those who had carried, fought and died for these flags, he was moved to note that “the sight of the ‘Old Flags’ revived in the minds of all recollections of past victories and defeats, of friends lost and a country saved.”

The *Allegan Journal* of January 4, 1879 noted that “the office of Adjutant General John Robertson has been removed from the city of Detroit to spacious rooms in the new capitol. The quartermaster general and inspector general’s offices are connected together. All the military records of the state are under the charge of that gallant soldier, General Robertson, himself. . . . The museum is in charge of Q.M General Saviers, and adjoins that of the adjutant general. All the battle-flags of every Michigan regiment of cavalry, infantry and artillery are there and grouped by regiments in a plated glass case.” The reporter, apparently stunned by the public interest in the flags, went on to note that “these tokens of the valor of our glorious Michigan boys in blue are always observed by every visitor, *including politicians and women* (emphasis added).” The article concluded, “included in this museum are a number of captured rebel flags and numerous other military trophies and relics. Among these is the identical cavalry standard of the noble 4th Michigan, under whose folds Jeff Davis surrendered while decorated in women’s attire.”

The dedication ceremonies featured an ode to the new capitol written by the Reverend George Duffield and set to the air “The Watch On the Rhine.” One of the verses had particular importance for Adjutant General Roberston and all those who had so recently passed through the war:

High noon we meet! The opening year
We welcome as an omen clear,
Of brighter, better days in store,
When violence is heard no more;
When the dear flag, without a stain,
O’er every State supreme shall reign.

For the next 111 years, the history of Michigan’s battle flags would be part of the history of the capitol. The tradition of displaying battle flags in the capitol would be revitalized periodically: flags carried by Michigan troops during the 1898 Spanish American War were added to those in the Military Museum and, after World War I, special cases were constructed in the east entrance first floor corridor to accommodate Michigan battle flags carried in that war.

The memories of the Civil War would be forever embedded in the blood and bones of this country and the flags became the physical embodiments of those memories. Just a year after the war ended, the Grand Army of the Republic, representing Civil War veterans, was formed. It quickly became one of America’s most powerful lobbying groups, working for veterans’ benefits and related issues. Its members met, erected monuments, marked graves, marched together and relived the memorable and terrible moments of the war.

In addition, survivors of the various regiments formed associations and began to hold reunions, sometimes at the capitol, with veterans sometimes coming long distances to see their old comrades again. Regimental associations, like the G.A.R., worked to preserve the memory of the war, especially the stories of the common soldier, stories which might otherwise have gone unrecorded and forgotten. Newspaper accounts of G.A.R. annual encampments and annual regimental reunions, as well as G.A.R. publications, reported the reminiscences of aging veterans.

The Grand Rapids *Daily Democrat* of December 14, 1882 reported, for example, that although the annual reunion of the "Old Third" had attracted only 40 of the "boys," they managed to have a thoroughly good time anyway. "The afternoon was spent in the lodge room of the G.A.R., where the boys played cards, drank cider and smoked cigars until the air was thicker than after the command's fiercest engagements in the field. The old commanders gathered with the boys around the same tables and old time army revelry mingled with anecdotes and stories of the dark days they were recalling." "Such reunions serve the double purpose of forming a source of pleasure for 'the men who wore the blue,' and of teaching patriotism to the rising generation," stated the G.A.R. publication *The Veteran* in 1884.

The rallying point of such reunions continued to be--as it was during the war--the "old flags." Despite orders to do so, not every regimental flag had actually been relinquished to the state. Some battle-torn banners had been sent home for safekeeping during the war and rather than turning them over after the war--either by accident or design--remained in the hands of individuals or in various communities around the state. This was particularly true of a regiment's first colors, which were closely associated with the community and the ladies who presented them. Wherever veterans or the community retained their beloved battle flags, they became the venerated stars of regimental reunions, evoking memory and emotion more powerfully than could any other memento of the war.

"At the 13th annual reunion of the old Fourth Infantry in Jonesville," reported *The Veteran* in 1884, "the number present was one hundred and one, some of whom had come over a thousand miles to again greet comrades whom they had not seen since the close of the war, and to look again upon the 'old flag,' under whose smoke-begrimed, bullet-scarred, bloodstained folds some of them had bled and many of their heroic comrades had died . . . the silent tears stealing down their manly faces as they again beheld the flag which, in manhood's prime, they had defended so nobly." H.W. Magee, who had traveled from Chicago to attend, stepped forward to carry the flag to the speaker's platform. "As his lips trembled with emotion and his eyes grew moist with tears, he grasped it and bore it to the front of the platform, where for a moment he paused and finally said, 'Boys, do you see that flag? How it talks!'" and, regaining control, went on to recount its many battles. A.U. Cole, who had come all the way from Nebraska, said that "it had been twenty years since he had seen the old flag, and that he had come a thousand miles to see it, and it had richly paid him."

For those who had obeyed the call to surrender their flags in 1866, some had bitter second thoughts. As the old soldiers, in ever-dwindling numbers, met regularly to remember heroic deeds and salute fallen comrades, requests were often made of the Adjutant General to allow the temporary removal of the "old flags" from the Military Museum so they could "bless the eyes of

the old boys” once more at their reunions. The Adjutant General regretfully denied most requests for fear of damaging the fragile, aging flags. Some veterans swore they would never have turned over their banners in the first place if they had known they would be denied access to them later.

Writing to Governor Crapo in 1867 on behalf of the 24th Michigan Volunteer Regiment, Albert Edwards pleaded for the return of one of the flags the regiment had turned over the year before. He argued that the state had no claim on this particular flag. It was the gift of friends and had been left with the state for safekeeping only. Now the regiment wanted it back. Adjutant General Robertson had refused their request, so they appealed to the governor. Governor Crapo’s reply: “I do not see how I can give you an order for the flag to which you refer. The flags were all returned to the State on a very solemn public occasion and deposited in her archives; and, so far as I know, are now the property of the State. The granting of an order by me, in this case, would, I fear, be establishing a very questionable precedent, and one that might hereafter lead to much trouble, as others would be very likely to prefer similar claims.”

Some of the flags held by individuals and the regimental associations would eventually find their way to the Military Museum in Lansing. As veterans dropped away, survivors, concerned about the fate of their precious flags after the last “old boy” was gone, often voted to forward them to the “archives of the state,” to be preserved with their fellows. On December 14, 1882, at Grand Rapids, the Old Third unanimously agreed to present the flag given to them by the Ladies of Grand Rapids, “the arms on which were worked by a young lady who died of consumption soon after,” to the state. The flag was described somewhat ruefully in the *Grand Rapids Democrat* as being “in rags and a perfect wreck, being much more tattered now than when it was sent home from the wars . . . and then it was shot to pieces.” In this way, the collection in the capitol slowly grew. Other flags eventually found their way to community museums or local collections. Still others simply disappeared, never to be seen again, their ultimate fate a mystery.

The capitol collection grew in another way. For years after the war, one of the particular goals of regimental associations was to locate and redeem flags lost in battle. The capture of a battle flag was a terrible calamity and one of the greatest dishonors to befall a regiment. Union flags captured by the South and discovered in Richmond at the end of the war were not returned to their regiments but rather forwarded to Washington. It was up to the regiments to prove they deserved them back. Had they fought valiantly? Had the loss been unavoidable? Veterans would work for years to locate missing flags and erase the terrible blot on their record.

A good example was the very first flag presented to a Michigan regiment, the magnificent battle flag of the First Michigan Regiment Volunteer Infantry (Three Months). This costly banner, painted with the state’s coat-of-arms and the motto, “Michigan’s Daughters To Her Sons: Defend It,” was captured at Bull Run on July 21, 1861. After the war it was discovered and sent to Washington. It wasn’t until 1886, however, that the United States Adjutant General wrote to Governor Alger, finally agreeing to transfer the flag back to Michigan because, as he noted, “The records of this Office show that the 1st Michigan Infantry gallantly participated in the action at Bull Run, Virginia, July 21, 1861, losing one hundred and seventeen Officers and enlisted men killed, wounded and missing, and that the flag must have been lost under circumstances reflecting great credit upon the regiment.” Governor Alger received the flag, and then forwarded it at once to Jackson with this note:

“Forwarded with the flag to Gen. W. H. Withington at Jackson, Mich, with congratulations to the “old First.” After the reunion to be held May 5th prox. the flag and this letter to be sent to the Adjutant General at Lansing to be placed among the archives of the state. April 30, 1886.”

Five days after the reunion in Jackson, Withington returned the flag as directed with this note:

“Respectfully forwarded with the flag. It blessed the eyes of the old First Michigan boys who saw it once again after the lapse of twenty-five years.”

The battle flag of the First Michigan Infantry finally joined the other regimental flags in the Military Museum in Lansing to be preserved to this very day. Other flags were not as fortunate. On September 4, 1862, 22 young ladies of Pontiac presented the newly-formed 22nd Michigan Infantry with a beautiful silken stand of colors. The money for one flag--the “Old Glory,” which had cost \$125--had been raised by holding socials each week and charging 10 cents admittance (all soldiers admitted free). Miss Emma Adams and Miss Julia Comstock, described by *The Pontiac Gazette* of August 24, 1894 as “two beautiful and accomplished young ladies,” presented the flag and another procured by the state to Colonel Moses Wisner, the former Michigan governor who had raised the regiment and who was to die of typhoid fever in Kentucky in 1863. On September 20, 1863, the flags were captured at Chickamauga after the most fearful losses: 372 captured, killed, wounded or missing and seven out of nine color bearers killed or wounded. A description of the carnage was provided in the 1894 *Gazette* by the members of 22nd’s Flag Committee:

“While bearing this (the stars and stripes) flag aloft, on that terrible Sunday afternoon, Color Sergeant Philo G. Durkee of Co. A, was struck in the breast by a grape shot and fell forward clasping it to his heart, placing the seal of his devotion upon its folds. Corporal Richard A. Stansell, of Company H took the colors from the brave Durkee’s dying embrace and he, too, sealed his devotion to this flag with his life. Corporal Pearl L. Mitchell, of Company A, grasped the colors and raised them aloft, amid the fearful leaden hail. A shot carried away his left arm, when Corporal Jonathon A. Vincent, of Company C raised and waved the colors defiantly in the face of the enemy, but he too fell severely wounded. Sergeant Oscar Kendall carried the flag last, only reluctantly surrendering it at order of his superior officer when the regiment was cut to pieces and overwhelmed.”

That was the last time any member of the regiment saw the colors until they were accidentally discovered in Washington in 1892 after 30 long years of searching. It took an act of Congress, through a bill introduced by Michigan’s Senator McMillan, to shake the flags free of red tape, but finally, on August 30, 1894, they were returned to Pontiac--the very city where they had been presented--in time for the regiment’s 27th annual reunion. 5,000 people were on hand to see the flags, many for the first time in 32 years. Sergeant Kendall, the last man to carry “Old Glory,” was not among them: he had died three months before of pneumonia.

The two ladies who had first presented the flags to Colonel Wisner were there, however, and they joined in the cheering and tears as the flags--still clearly stained with blood--were unfurled

to the breeze once more. Paramount in everyone's mind was the question: had their regiment been redeemed along with their flags? Colonel Dean reported: "Official reports of the war department showed that . . . instead of being called cowards the regiment had been shown worthy of having the flags they lost returned to them. A great load was lifted from every heart: the regiment had saved the day and on those flags should be printed in gold 'The Rock of Chickamauga.'" "

Colonel Dean of the 22nd had written Governor Rich in July, thanking him for turning over the flags to the regiment in trust, rather than placing them in the Military Museum "They are too precious to run any risk of their destruction, and should be preserved as sacred relects (sic), and will eventually be placed with other flags carried by Michigan troops." This promise was never kept. The regiment apparently held onto their flags for years. In Pontiac on August 29, 1917, the regiment held its 50th reunion. The few remaining white-bearded veterans gathered with their beloved flags one more time. Two elderly ladies held "Old Glory"--just as they did when they presented the flag so long ago. Julia Comstock and Emma Adams faced the camera to record the event. Ironically, 74 years later, this photograph became the centerpiece of a poster sold to raise money for the preservation of Michigan's Civil War battle flags, but the flags it depicts were never seen again.

In his January 1863 message to the legislature, Governor Blair spoke of the soldiers in the field: "I commend the Michigan troops to your active sympathy and support. Their battle cry is 'Michigan! Remember Michigan!' and Michigan must remember them. Let us hand down their names to posterity upon an illuminated page, that they might be revered as examples for all time to come. They belong to history now."

In the years just following the war, it seemed inconceivable that any veteran or his descendants would—or could--forget even the smallest detail of those cataclysmic years. But, by the turn of the century, memory began to fade. Despite Governor Blair's plea and Governor Crapo's pledge to always remember the flags and what they stood for, their history and meaning began to slip away along with the "old boys" themselves. As Colonel Frederick Schneider, the last commander of the Second Michigan Infantry, would sadly write only 40 years after the war:

"Of the thousands of visitors, who annually pass through the Military Museum of Michigan's State Capitol, with but a perfunctory glance at the old Michigan battle flags, stored there in glass cases, probably not more than one in a thousand of the present generation ever realizes or comprehends what a vast amount of heroism, sacrifice of noble lives and treasure it cost to bear them to a triumphant issue in that great crucial struggle for national existence; that most tragic period in the history of that country--the great Civil War. Oh, could they but speak, what touching scenes of heroism they could give, scenes that no tongue can now tell nor pen adequately describe."

In 1905, alarmed by this trend, the G.A.R. attempted to "rally 'round the flags" once more. Winfield Sly, the Michigan G.A.R.'s Special Aide for Patriotic Instruction and Military Training in Public Schools, (whose job, described as "very trying," was to promote patriotism in the younger generation) announced a contest. The prize would be twenty dollars in gold for the best history of a regimental flag. It had to be written by an "old soldier" who had actually carried or

followed a Union flag. The purpose was not only to rescue flag history, much of which was largely unrecorded, but to use these stirring stories in the schools to instill patriotism and reverence for the past. The results were disappointing. Few entries were submitted. "So few comrades have clear recollections of events directly connected with their regimental colors," lamented Sly, who had personally pledged the twenty dollars. "With us will pass away the knowledge of incidents that made regimental flags sacred to us. Could that knowledge have been preserved, for our sons and daughters, they would prize more highly and keep more sacredly the old flags."

Frederick Schneider won the contest. His purpose in entering was, in his words, to "rescue from oblivion as far as possible the history of the flags of the Second Michigan Veteran Volunteer Infantry," but, although he accomplished his immediate goal, he could not reverse the overall tide. Membership in the G.A.R. continued to decline, its power waned, and interest in the Civil War and its artifacts faded. The decline was evident even in the capitol in Lansing.

In 1897, an act provided for a room in the capitol to serve both as the headquarters of the Michigan G.A.R. and as a repository for its records. In 1915, its mission expanded to include the veterans of the Spanish-American War. Finally, in 1947, it became simply the Michigan Veterans' Room. This room may have been originally granted to the G.A.R. to compensate for what was being lost down the corridor. The Auditor General occupied offices on the first floor of the south wing directly across from the Adjutant General and the Military Museum, as well as offices across from the armory on the ground floor. By 1897, the Auditor General had more than filled his allotted space and began to look around for more. He did not have far to look. Remembering that space in the capitol has always been directly related to prestige and power, it is a telling measure of the Military Department's waning influence that the Quartermaster General was ordered to move the armory out of the capitol to make way for the Auditor General. There were objections, but power had passed from the war hero to the accountant.

This was only a prelude to what was to come. In 1909, the Board of State Auditors met to consider the possibility of constructing eight cases in the first floor rotunda of the capitol "for the purpose of holding the battle flags which are now in the war museum." The supposed reason for the move was to more adequately display the collection, which had grown to include the flags of the Spanish-American War. But again the real reason was space and power. The Adjutant General's offices and the Military Museum with its elegant glass flag case must be vacated, again to make room for the Auditor General. The Adjutant General bitterly opposed eviction. It is a mark of their importance that--almost 50 years after the war--the flags were not evicted along with him. The battle flags would remain in the capitol which had been built to enshrine them.

The Adjutant General had long opposed--for fear of damage or loss--requests from the regimental associations to borrow battle flags for reunions and other occasions. But now, since the flags had to be removed from the Military Museum anyway, a golden opportunity presented itself. In February, 1909, the G.A.R. announced from its headquarters in the capitol that the 31st annual encampment of the Michigan G.A.R. would be held in Kalamazoo in June. As part of the proceedings, there would be a parade on June 23. "One of the interesting features of this parade will be *The Old Battle Flags of Michigan Regiments*," proudly reported the *G.A.R. Reports* for that year. Governor Warner and Quartermaster James Kidd had consented to allow the flags to be

taken out--under certain restrictions. "There appears to be some apprehension that to take the flags out for the parade would be to destroy them. The arrangements are that these flags shall be closely rolled and encased in netting, with a streamer attached giving the name of the regiment by whom they were carried in the war. They will be safely packed and kept under strict guard from the time they leave the Capitol until their return. Surely no one will take more pride in seeing that no harm shall come to these flags than the comrades who marched and fought under their folds. It is also hoped to secure a large number of the old color bearers, with a color guard to carry them in the parade." Another feature of the parade was to be "Living Marching Flag" composed of over 1200 school children!

The June 13 *Kalamazoo Gazette* headlines proclaimed, "Many Battle Flags To Be Brought Here: List of Regiments To Whom Sacred Relics Belonged Is Imposing One." The newspaper had already featured articles informing the public this would be the first--and last--time the flags would be taken from the state capitol. The flags would arrive on the train from Lansing, then, escorted by a drum corps and band, taken to the post office where they would be kept in a vault until the parade. The flags would be accompanied by members of the Lansing G.A.R. post, each banner assigned to a member who would guarantee its safekeeping. Governor Warner would ride in the parade on horseback, but the stars of the show would be the flags themselves, with as many carried by former color bearers as possible. "Lift your hats and let your eyes rest on those flags with reverence," implored the *Gazette* on June 20. "Let patriotism swell within your hearts. Do not attempt to touch these old flags. They are too sacred for the touch of human hands."

A poem published in the June 23 *Gazette* captured the theme of the huge gathering: the passing of a generation and the hope that their memory and accomplishments might survive:

The Passing Veteran

Every year they're marching slower
Every year they're stooping lower
Every year the lilting music stirs the hearts of older men;
Every year the flags above them
Seem to bend and bless and love them
As if grieving for the future when they'll never march again!

Every year grows dimmer, duller
Tattered flag and fading color;
Every year the hands that bear them find a harder task to do,
And the eyes that only brightened
When the blaze of battle lightened,
Like the tattered flags they follow are grown dim and faded too.

Every year we see them massing,
Every year we watch them passing,
Scarcely pausing in our hurry after pleasure, after gain.
But the battle flags above them
Seem to bend and bless and love them

And through all the lilting music sounds an undertone of pain!

“There was something deeply touching and almost sacred in the bringing to Kalamazoo yesterday by the members of the Lansing post of the torn and tattered old battleflags of the Michigan regiments that fought in the Civil War,” reported the *Gazette*. “Each flag with its tragic history of battles won and lost was a mutely eloquent reminder of the dark days of the Rebellion and as the old soldiers gazed upon these worn and mutilated ensigns many an eye grew moist and many a voice quivered as it cheered the arrival of the flags in the city. Since the close of the war these historic battleflags have reposed in the capitol at Lansing and in hundreds of instances it was the first time the veterans had feasted their eyes upon them since they followed them into battle nearly half a century before. Today the angel of peace guards each precious flag and the survivors of the regiments to which they belonged will follow them through flower-strewn avenues to the sound of inspiring music and the ringing cheers of thousands of patriots, young and old. . . each a glorious memento of the greatest conflict in history, revered by every veteran in Michigan and sacredly regarded by every patriot. As the flags go marching by today, each in its protecting case, think of what they represent; think of where they have been; of the men who died under their blood-stained folds; of the years to come when they shall crumble into dust and---Salute the flags! Hats off!”

Over 50,000 visitors crowded Kalamazoo and more than 5,000 veterans marched. It was largest statewide encampment ever, but there was a strong sense that these numbers would never be equaled again--never again would veterans march behind the old flags. It was the end of an era.

The flags were safely returned to the capitol and, by 1910, the Art Metal Construction Company of Jamestown, New York, had constructed eight metal cases in the rotunda. The flags were placed in these cases in regimental order, standing upright and loosely furled on their staffs. The staffs had been cut down to fit the eight-foot-tall cases. Each staff was mounted in a brass base which was engraved with the name of the regiment. Two huge curved glass panels, etched with the state’s coat-of-arms, covered each case. An attempt was made to guarantee the preservation of the flags by pumping the air out of the cases to create a vacuum, replacing it with nitrogen gas, and putting the cases shut. It is unlikely that the gas--which had no preservative action in any event--remained in the cases very long. Nevertheless, for many years—in a sort of “Dorian Grey” effect--it was feared that opening the cases would allow the gas to escape and cause the flags to crumble instantly into dust. As a final touch, Art Metal constructed “nine bronze tablets,” which were installed in the rotunda next to the cases and recorded the name of each regiment, its total enrollment, and the numbers of those who had been killed in action or died of wounds and disease. The final cost of the project was \$5,613.13.

In 1911, the Rikerd Lumber Company won an award to construct “relic cases” for the relocation of the Military Museum to the rotunda basement in the capitol. At the same time, Public Act 230 of 1911 established that both the basement museum and the battle flags upstairs in the rotunda would be under the “full control and management” not of the Adjutant General, but of the Board of State Auditors. The G.A.R. was allowed to select three people to “assist” the Board (but only if asked) in soliciting and displaying war relics. The torch had passed from the veterans’ hands: the flags were now the orphaned wards of the state.

On the occasion of sealing the flags in their glass cases in the rotunda, Huntley Russell, the State Land Commissioner, wrote a poem entitled, "Michigan Battle Flags." It was presented to the Women's Relief Corps of the Lansing Charles T. Foster Post of the G.A.R. The poem, reprinted here only in part, expresses the meaning and emotion the flags still evoked for many:

God of the Battles and the Blood!
God of Home and God of Love!
Look down from thy throne on us we pray,
And bless these flags we furl today.

Flags all rent, and tattered and torn,
Flags without color, and flags without form.
Were it not for the staff, some you'd never call flags;
And some just a mass of tangled rags.

Motionless you now rest here in the State,
But thy silence a perpetual oration,
Will teach the children yet unborn
The glorious past of our great Nation.

Oh flags! Dear flags! in every heart
The patriotic fire still flames,
With trembling hand we seal thee now,
With moistened eye we read the names--

A grateful people have fixed this place,
Oh Flags, could you ask a fairer fate?
Sleep sweet, in thy caskets of steel and plate,
In this Holy of Holies, of our great state.

It is obvious from their design--they lack doors and the glass panels covering them were screwed and puttied into place--that the cases were intended to literally entomb the flags and guarantee they would never again be removed from the capitol. Sealed in their cases, they were visible but inaccessible. Additionally, the belief that exposure to air would cause the flags to instantly disintegrate discouraged thoughts of unsealing them. This effectively put an end to requests to "borrow" the old flags for special occasions and did, in fact, keep the collection intact for the next 50 years.

The tradition of preserving and displaying Michigan war memorabilia in the capitol was carried forward in 1921, when the battle flags of the Michigan regiments taking part in the great World War joined the flags of the Civil and Spanish-American Wars. Since there was no room in the rotunda, additional cases were constructed nearby, on the north wall of the east entrance corridor just off the rotunda on the first floor.

The years ticked away. Hanging silently in the dimly lit capitol, many began to forget what they represented and why they were there. In 1931, a fire on the ground floor just inside the east

entrance resulted in heat and smoke damage to the cases of the military museum in the ground floor rotunda. Heat cracked the glass ceiling and smoke seeped upstairs to the flag cases, but no damage was sustained.

Then, in 1941, with the nation on the eve of war, Civil War battle flags were in the news again. In Michigan, as elsewhere, captured rebel flags were considered spoils of war and victors' trophies. Despite the fact that the federal government had long ago (in 1905) passed legislation allowing and even encouraging the repatriation of captured Southern flags, thirteen such flags remained in the state's possession 76 years after the end of the war. The suggestion had been made to return them as early as 1913. Since the war was over, the argument ran, hadn't the time come for Michigan to do its part to unite the nation and mend the breach between North and South? The plea fell on deaf ears. Not until the last Civil War veteran was gone ran the usual sentiment. Thirty more years passed before Michigan was finally ready to lay the issue to rest.

On September 20, 1941, an impressive and unique ceremony took place on the front steps of the capitol. It was broadcast to a listening nation over the radio. Governor Van Wagoner presented thirteen rebel flags captured by Michigan troops--and three swords--to representatives of twelve southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Among those receiving the flags were several governors and 95-year-old General Julius Howell, commander of the remaining 500 Confederate veterans. Also present were three surviving Michigan Union veterans: James Hamilton, Lansing's sole Civil War survivor; 97-year-old William Howland of Battle Creek; and Smith Carleton of Kalamazoo.

The common theme of the remarks that day was one of national unity, especially in the face of "the darkly seen trials ahead," as Governor Van Wagoner phrased it. "Love and understanding have replaced all bitterness and hate," he continued. Virginia's Governor Price responded that the ceremony would serve to bind the states together at a time of vital national need: "proof to the dictators of the world that we stand together a united people." It seemed especially important to all present that America heal her old wounds and unite to face the threat from abroad.

Michigan was actually among the last to return Southern battle flags. State Senator Carl Delano of Kalamazoo, who sponsored the authorizing legislation, said he felt that Michigan hadn't fully realized their importance to the South. "We weren't looking on these flags as a symbol of the valiant spirit of men who gave their lives for a principle. I know now that we were wrong." The last veterans of the Civil War, both North and South, were almost gone, but the battle flags they carried still wielded great power.

As the flags, packed in gift boxes trimmed with red, white and blue, were presented to the representatives from each state, Governor Van Wagoner commented that they "are undying mementos left behind by brave Americans of both the North and the South" and that it would not have been appropriate to have merely quietly returned them. We needed some public demonstration, he continued, to show that the bitterness which once divided the North and South was now dissolved. The editor of *Michigan History Magazine* added this postscript to the day's proceedings: "They are but flags, but they speak to us of the thousands of boys in Gray, who with the faith and hope of youth went into battle for a cause they held dear . . . these flags tell of

hopes, and of fears, and of prayers for these boys.” These words must have seemed especially poignant to America on the eve of World War II, just a few months before Pearl Harbor.

The last Michigan Civil War veteran was Orlando LeValley of Caro, who died on April 19, 1948 at the age of one hundred, and with him died the Michigan Department of the Grand Army of the Republic. But the Civil War--and particularly Michigan's role in it--was not entirely forgotten. Centennials are always a time of remembrance and in 1958, only ten years after the death of LeValley, Governor Williams appointed a Civil War Centennial Commission to prepare for the one hundredth anniversary of the great war. The commission's charge was to mark the events of the war, to commemorate the ideals and values which had led so many to volunteer to fight in it, and to explore its lasting effect on Michigan and the nation. The often untold stories of the home front were also to be explored. In 1960, the group was renamed the Michigan Civil War Centennial Observance Commission. Their charge remained much the same, but included the collection and preservation of Civil War artifacts.

As a direct result of the Commission's work, 25 publications were issued covering almost every aspect of Michigan in the Civil War, numerous conferences and other events were held, plaques were unveiled and awards handed out, but one of the first issues to confront the Commission was the alarming condition of the Civil War battle flags in the capitol rotunda. Described as “rapidly deteriorating,” the Commission in 1960 appointed Solan Weeks, the Director of the Michigan Historical Commission Museum, to head a Flag Preservation Committee. Like many others, Weeks at first assumed that the tattered appearance of the flags was entirely due to age and neglect, but he soon discovered that most of the damage had actually been inflicted in battle. “They were literally torn to shreds on every battle field of the war,” he observed, “and their tattered remains and fragments were proudly presented and have been carefully and reverently preserved over the years as a permanent monument to the gallant and courageous Michigan men who carried them or fought under them during the great conflict.”

Nevertheless, it was clear that age was beginning to be a factor and it was felt to be important to do something before it was too late. The centennial of the Civil War seemed like the perfect opportunity: interest ran high and funds would be much easier to raise. Weeks began to publicize the need to preserve the flags and to ask other museums about their recommendations in undertaking such a project. His inquiries led him to Colonel Frederick Todd of the West Point Museum in West Point, New York. Colonel Todd told him of a technique called “netting” which had been used on nearly 700 flags in their collection. Mrs. Franklin Roser of New York was the only person in the country using the technique, but she had apparently cornered the market: besides the West Point flags, she had netted the collections in a half dozen state capitols. Her technique was to lay out and press the fragments of a flag, and then make two new “flags” of nylon netting dyed to correspond to the colors of the original. The flag was then placed between the layers of netting and all three layers sewn together on a sewing machine, using a zigzag stitch. The price was \$4.75 per square foot. Mrs. Roser estimated that it took her a week to ten days to complete a flag. “I might add,” said Colonel Todd, “that this method of restoration permits the flag to be displayed in any fashion thereafter and even used in ceremonies.”

With Todd's information, Weeks figured the cost of netting Michigan's flags at about \$13,500, based on a collection of 211 flags, 157 of them from the Civil War. This sum included money for

photographing each flag, which was extremely important since no one knew what they really looked like. The loosely furled flags, although technically on display, were so crowded in their dimly-lit, shallow rotunda cases that little more than a cursory glimpse of a single fold, or a portion of a fringe, was possible. Weeks' estimate proved far too low. He thought the infantry flags, which make up the bulk of the collection, measured only 3 by 5 feet, rather than 6 by 6.5 feet--a serious miscalculation only discovered when they were removed for netting. In the meantime, however, Governor Romney asked the legislature to appropriate \$13,500 for the flags in the 1963-1964 fiscal year.

But now an obstacle presented itself. Hearing of the project, officials of the Property Management Division of the Department of Administration, the agency now holding jurisdiction over the flags, objected that opening the cases, which they believed to be hermetically sealed, would result in disaster. The nitrogen gas pumped in years ago would escape and the flags crumble to dust at their first exposure to oxygen. Weeks had always doubted this theory, but now he found it necessary to call on an expert to back him up. Colonel Todd assured veterans and authorities that no harm would result from opening the cases. Indeed, it seemed unlikely that any nitrogen remained after 50 years. In the meantime, the Michigan National Guard Association, which had been independently studying the matter, threw its considerable support behind the project and urged the "restoration" of the collection. This appeared to do the trick and Colonel Todd's testimony overcame any remaining qualms. When Governor Romney signed the appropriations bill on May 23, 1963, the National Guard agreed to pay to bring Colonel Todd to Lansing to oversee the removal of the flags.

"At 9 a.m. on Tuesday, September 10, 1963, the moment we had eagerly awaited, arrived," recounted Weeks. As members of the Historical Commission, the Michigan National Guard, legislators and local TV stations and the press watched, a heavy plate glass panel was lifted from a case and the first flags were removed and unfurled. "I am sure that some of those present . . . fully expected to hear a rush of air enter the cases and see the Civil War flag remnants crumble into a pile of dust on the floor. Fortunately, this did not happen!" Each flag was photographed as planned, but now Weeks saw his error: "We discovered to our dismay that the majority measured 6' by 6 1/2', thus doubling our original estimate of the number of square feet to be restored, as well as the cost of the project." Nonetheless, 19 flags--the contents of the first case representing the 1st through 4th Infantries--were rolled on cardboard tubes and packaged for shipping to Mrs. Roser.

The first flags were completed and returned to Michigan. On May 22, 1964, with the netted flags waving gently in the breeze for the first time in almost 100 years, a ceremony attended by officials, dignitaries, historians and veterans was held on the steps of the capitol. Afterward the flags were carried by an honor guard to the rotunda to be reinstalled. A second batch of flags was sent to Mrs. Roser on September 3, 1964, representing the 5th through the 11th Infantries, and returned on June 16, 1965. It was the Commission's hope that all the flags would be netted by July 4, 1966, the one hundredth anniversary of the flag presentation ceremony in Detroit. The Commission considered the effort to save Michigan's battle flags one of its greatest achievements. It seemed to Solan Weeks that, by redeeming Governor Crapo's pledge, they had devised the most fitting tribute possible.

But the Commission failed to meet its July 4, 1966 deadline. The flags in the third case, representing the 11th through 15th Infantry, left Lansing on July 9, 1965 and returned on June 11, 1966. In the summer of 1966, the flags in the fourth case were removed, but now another problem arose. The Commission would cease to exist on June 30, 1966. Who would continue the flag project? The Property Management Division was still in charge of the flags. Now the Commission proposed transferring this authority to the Michigan Historical Commission. Furthermore, one of the huge curved glass panels on the fourth case had been broken and a dispute arose over who was to pay \$780 for its replacement. To resolve the issue, the Michigan Historical Commission funded a new panel, but the squabble--along with the loss of the Commission, arguments over jurisdiction, and an extensive overflooring project taking place in the capitol as part of a general remodeling--brought the flag project to a halt. The fourth case's flags were not returned until February 2, 1971. By then, momentum had been lost. Additional funds--appropriated when it was discovered that the original estimate for the netting project was too small--had lain dormant too long and the money had been automatically returned to the General Fund. The project was over, leaving 58 Civil War battle flags in cases five through eight (and all of the flags of later wars) unnetted.

It was just as well. Throughout the project, netting was referred to as a preservation or even a restoration technique. In fact, it is neither. Although netting certainly kept flag fragments together and prevented further loss, netting--like many other similar efforts--was not a preservation technique but a display technique, as Colonel Todd himself made clear. It added nothing to the longevity of the flags, but rather made it possible to handle and display them on their staffs. It was widely believed that netting reduced the strain on flags but, unfortunately, nylon netting stretches, adding little to their support while adding considerably to their weight. Further, dyed netting obscures the actual flag and makes it hard to view: in fact, many today confuse netting with the flag itself. Upon viewing a netted flag, many exclaim that it appears to be in excellent condition: what's the fuss? It is only when the areas of actual flag are pointed out that the viewer begins to "see" the flag and understand its condition. Finally, the technique violated the first rule of conservation: do no damage. In other words, can the procedure be safely reversed? Can the treatment be removed, leaving the item as it was before? Unfortunately, the thousands of tiny perforations made by Mrs. Roser's sewing machine can never be removed. The stitches were set so closely together that the brittle, painted silk has been shattered: damage that can never be repaired. As unfortunate as netting was, however, it could have been far worse. Efforts undertaken in other states to prepare their huge, fragile banners for display often involved glues and other adhesives which attack and eventually destroy fabrics such as silk.

The years ticked away and the Civil War flags, approximately half encased in netting and the rest still hanging in tatters, hung quietly in dusty rotunda cases. Controversy swirled around them: a plan to replace the old capitol with a new structure considered more appropriate to "atomic age" Michigan had been debated for years. The new capitol would not be built with Civil War flags in mind; in fact, it is hard to imagine ragged battle flags in the sleek, futuristic structure being planned. The failure of the new capitol scheme, however, led legislative leaders to remodel the old capitol. By 1971, the building had been modernized and extensive new office space created. The rotunda, however, was spared the ruthless renovation. When the capitol celebrated its 100th birthday in 1979, the flags still hung in their historic home.

In 1987, Michigan celebrated its 150th birthday in a year-long Sesquicentennial Celebration. This milestone further served to focus public attention on the past and awaken new interest in historic preservation. It seemed another golden opportunity for the battle flags. A Michigan Sesquicentennial Commission was formed in 1986 and its Military Affairs Subcommittee, chaired by historian and teacher David Finney, immediately called attention to the condition of the collection. Noting that only a portion of the flags had been “restored” in the 1960s and calling for the preservation of the remainder, Finney launched a vigorous fund raising campaign. A fund raiser held May 10, 1986 at Commission Co-Chair Jerry Roe’s residence in Lansing raised \$5,000 for the conservation of just one flag: a guidon carried by the Michigan Cavalry Brigade under Brigadier General George Custer--a far cry from the \$13,500 estimated adequate to preserve the entire collection in 1962! Eventually, money would be raised for the treatment of not only this flag but of several others in the collection.

However, new questions about the direction treatment should take were being raised. Netting had been the state-of-the-art treatment in the 1960s. Had advances been made? What did “restoration” mean when applied to battle flags? Should they be restored? Was it even possible to restore them? Was restoration the same as preservation? If not, which should be the goal of those caring for the flags? Was the collection too far gone for either restoration or preservation? The true value of the Commission’s work was to focus attention on these questions.

To answer them, Angelea Lakwete, a textile conservator from the Detroit Institute of Art, examined the collection in August, 1986. Working with Maria Quinlan Leiby of the Bureau of Michigan History, glass panels were removed from some cases to allow a closer examination of the collection. Lakwete lamented the effects of Mrs. Roser’s netting, noting that “work of this type destroys the flags by creating a mesh of holes where the needle has regularly pierced the silk. Painted state seals and regimental designations are cracked by the machine stitching.” Even more alarming, unnetted flags showed ominous signs of deterioration: dust at the bottom of the cases were actually particles of silk fiber from the flags themselves. The flags were beginning to powder--an irreversible process which would, if unchecked, ultimately result in their total loss.

Lakwete pointed to the culprits: incandescent bulbs in light fixtures over each case exposed the flags to both heat and light. These agents, in addition to fluctuations in relative humidity and exposure to dirt and smoke seeping into the poorly-sealed cases (the rotunda was, at this time, a designated smoking area in the capitol), were the silk flags greatest enemies. Lakwete’s recommendation: removal of the collection to a clean, environmentally controlled storage area where light levels could be monitored and flags could be stored flat. This would require the removal of staffs and the installation of each flag on a solid support. Pressure mounting individual flags with Plexiglas or another type of acrylic material was also recommended if vertical display was desired. Lakwete estimated the cost of treating the 62 unnetted Civil War flags in this manner at \$1,500 per flag--or \$93,000. She added, however, that \$2,000 per flag might be a safer estimate and raised another issue, even more important than where the funds for such a project could be found. Where were the flags--once treated--to be located? Would they be removed from the capitol, the building meant to enshrine them? Who would decide?

The subcommittee’s success in fundraising lent some urgency to these questions. Everyone wanted to make sure the funds were spent properly. No one wanted to subject the flags to

treatments which, no matter how well-meant at the time, would be later judged as ill-advised. In November 1987, a second report was submitted by textile conservator Helene Von Rosenstiel of New York. Rosenstiel agreed with Lakwete's observations and added several of her own. These centered on the rotunda cases, which she held responsible for the lack of proper maintenance of the collection. Access was difficult: the two huge, curved panels of glass covering each case had to be removed by glass movers and the awkwardness and weight of the panels--each 4 feet wide by 8 feet high--added to the challenge. Furthermore, the cases were only 12 inches deep, far too shallow to safely accommodate the number of flags crowded into them. Each case contained 20 or more flags arranged in two rows. Crowding not only damaged the flags, but made viewing them difficult to impossible. The flags were only technically on "display."

Von Rosenstiel recognized that there were really two issues: preservation and exhibition. Preservation meant undertaking measures to extend the life of the collection and halt further deterioration. From a strictly preservation point of view, she pointed out that none of the flags should be on display at all. In the case of large, fragile, brittle fabrics like 120-year-old painted silk battle flags, everything required for exhibition--light, vertical display, handling--contributes to their destruction. Like Lakwete, she recognized that the flags should be stored flat in an appropriate facility. But she also recognized that preservation was not the only issue and that many wanted the flags to remain in the capitol. "To remove the flags from display," she noted, "is to deprive visitors of the impact of these tattered original documents." She recommended a compromise: install doors on the cases, exhibit only a portion of the collection at a time, and stabilize each flag by sewing it in crepeline. Such treatment differed from the netting of the 1960s in three ways: crepeline is much sheerer than netting; it does not stretch as much as netting; and all sewing would be done by hand.

Von Rosenstiel raised another possibility: why not restore the flags? Restoration would involve not just stabilization and halting deterioration, but actually returning a flag to its original appearance. Specifically, restoration would mean rebuilding the flag to its original dimensions; replacing areas of missing field with new silk; and reconstructing missing stars (at \$375 per star). The procedure would be extremely expensive, with estimates of as much as \$19,000 for a single flag. It also raised a new issue. Most of the damage suffered by the flags was not due to age but rather to battle. To the men who fought under them, such damage--each pitiful tatter and stain--meant something. Nothing else could provoke memory so powerfully and nothing else told their stories so eloquently. "Oh could they but speak," wrote Colonel Frederick Schneider of the Second Michigan Infantry, "what touching scenes of heroism they could give, scenes that no tongue can now tell nor pen adequately describe." Indeed, as already noted, regiments took far greater pride in their tattered flags than in new ones, no matter how resplendent. Even a single scrap of the "old flag" clinging to a staff was deeply revered, while new flags almost never won the same depth and degree of affection. "Speaking of flags," wrote Edward Taylor of the Fourth Michigan Infantry, "we have a new one now, but I think more of the old soiled flag we fought under on the Peninsula and in every battle till the last" (Edward H.C. Taylor Letters, Bentley, U of M).

Restoration was not the proper course. In the case of battle flags, where use and wear is a large part of their significance, restoration would result in obliterating the very qualities which gave them meaning. The subcommittee wisely decided not to take this costly, inappropriate and

unnecessary step. Instead, several flags, including one carried by the First Michigan Sharpshooters and one by the 24th Michigan Infantry, were sent to Von Rosenstiel for stabilization in crepeline.

Something important had been learned. Depending on whether preservation, restoration or exhibition of the flags is the goal, different treatments are available. The trick is to match the treatment to the goal. If preservation alone is the goal, and exhibition is not an issue, then “treatment” consists primarily of storing the flags in a controlled environment designed to control light, temperature, humidity, dirt and handling. If exhibition is an issue, however, then flags may need special and very costly treatment in order to stabilize them. Over the years, many treatments undertaken in the name of preservation were actually efforts—many of them unnecessarily destructive--to stabilize the flags for exhibition. To this day, many people remain confused over the distinctions between preservation, restoration and exhibition of the flags.

In late 1987 and early 1988, there was an unexpected event: the collection grew by one flag. It seems that in the push to repatriate captured Southern flags in 1941, Michigan had acted a little too eagerly. The state had presented Kentucky with a flag featuring a red Maltese cross on a white field, described as “possibly a hospital flag.” Kentucky held the flag in storage for 46 years. Eventually, Thomas Fugate, of the Kentucky Military Museum, examined it and contacted Howard Madaus, then of the Milwaukee Public Museum and one of the nation’s leading experts on Civil War flags. Madaus identified it as a “brigade flag designating the headquarters of the 3rd Brigade, 1st Division (symbolized by the red Maltese cross), 5th Army Corps, Army of the Potomac.” Noting that the colonel of the 16th Michigan Infantry had temporarily commanded the brigade during the summer of 1864, he speculated that the officer had retained his headquarters flag when a new one replaced it that winter. The 16th gained renown because it was one of the regiments to gain control of Little Round Top during the battle of Gettysburg. The flag had nothing to do with hospitals and nothing to do with Kentucky. Madaus suggested that the only reason the flag was “returned” to Kentucky was that--in the absence of any inkling of what it really represented--“Michigan was trying to spread good will to as many states as possible.” On March 30, 1988, at a ceremony attended by the Adjutant General of Kentucky, the Secretary of State of Michigan, and officials from the Bureau of Michigan History, the flag came home to Michigan--for the second and, one hopes, last time.

In 1989, a landmark project to restore Michigan’s 110-year-old state capitol began. Like the flags, the capitol had been showing its age. Deterioration from years of crowding and neglect had prompted state leaders to consider building a new capitol, but a growing appreciation for history--spurred by the nation’s bicentennial, the capitol’s 100th birthday and the state’s 150th birthday—led to a plan to save the old building and restore it back to the architectural gem it had once been. Overseeing the project was the newly-created Michigan Capitol Committee, a unique bipartisan, bicameral legislative-executive body representing those in charge of the building. The committee was also charged with the maintenance and use of the capitol--and responsibility for its collections.

Premiere among the collections were the battle flags. Restoring the shrine which housed them posed significant problems. Restoration would be messy. Fumes and dust could easily endanger the fragile silk flags, vulnerable in their glass cases. How could they best be protected? The first

plan—to simply leave the flags in place after protecting the cases with plywood—was abandoned as too risky. It soon became clear that another plan was needed. It also became clear that capitol restoration might actually provide a golden opportunity to save the flags—the best opportunity so far and also perhaps the last.

As early as April, 1990, Maria Quinlan Leiby, Curator of Collections at the Michigan Historical Museum, had raised the issues of what to do about the flags during restoration and how to provide for their long term preservation. On June 12, 1990, a historic meeting was held at the Michigan Historical Museum Chaired by Quinlan Leiby, it was attended by Jerry Lawler and Kerry Chartkoff, representing the Michigan Capitol Committee; Jack DeVine, Director of the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund; Nancy Kless of Friends of the Capitol, Inc.(a public non-profit organization supporting the restoration of the capitol); educator and Civil War expert David Finney, (who had already been involved in efforts to preserve the collection); and representatives of the Museum, the Council for the Humanities, and others. This broad-based group recognized that capitol restoration provided the best opportunity for truly saving the flags. There was a sense that the Capitol Battle Flag Collection--as it was now being called--was a legitimate part of capitol restoration. Discussion centered on how to take advantage of the opportunity. Many of the questions had been raised before: could the flags be preserved? If so, how? How could we avoid the mistakes of the past? How much would such a project cost and how would it be funded? How could we improve their display and accessibility? How would the public be informed about these decisions? How would the public be informed about the history and significance of the collection as well as its relationship to the capitol? And, finally, who would make these decisions?

The group had already made one decision: at least temporarily, the flags must be removed from the capitol. The possibility of accidental damage during restoration was too great. Nonetheless, everyone felt the gravity of this decision. The flags bore the weight of history and had been on display in the capitol since 1879. For many of the flags, it would be the first time they had been removed from the building since the Kalamazoo G.A.R. encampment in 1909.

Scaffolding was scheduled to rise in the rotunda in mid-August, 1990, so flag removal was scheduled for three days well before that date: June 27, 28 and 29. Many problems had to be overcome. Maria Quinlan Leiby, along with JoAnne Arasim, Rose Victory and Laurie Dickens, all of the Michigan Historical Museum, was in charge of planning and directing the actual removal. Kerry Chartkoff, Jerry Lawler and Chris Hargrove coordinated activities at the capitol. Volunteers from both the Museum and the capitol joined hands for this cooperative effort, the first of many in the coming struggle to find a way to save the collection.

Great care was taken at every step to protect the flags during removal. The general plan was to open only one case at a time, and to process all the flags in the case before moving to the next. This was done to avoid leaving the flags unprotected for extended periods of time and to prevent them from being exposed in open cases overnight. No one knew exactly how long it would take to open each case, since the glass panels which covered them were puttied as well as screwed into place. It turned out to be a very lengthy process: the putty was rock hard and had to be carefully chipped away by hand. A glass company was brought in for the job, which required three men to lower each huge, heavy panel of glass to the floor.

Once a case was opened, the flags, one at a time, were gingerly removed. Supported at all four corners, or carried in an unbleached muslin cradle, each flag was carried to the center of the rotunda and carefully laid on a large square of black photographer's paper placed directly on the glass floor. Twenty feet overhead, a wooden scaffold bridged the rotunda. It had been built for just one purpose: to create a platform for Peter Glendinning, professor of photography at Michigan State University and an expert in textile photography, who recorded each flag on film--for the first time in history--in color and black and white. These photographs would be a way of making the collection accessible to the public while the flags themselves were in storage. It would provide a way for scholars to study the collection; it would provide illustrations for articles and other publications; and it would provide accurate images for a public eager to see the flags their ancestors fought under. As Glendinning crouched over his cameras, sweltering under a black drape, each flag was spread out on the floor below. Civil War reenactors--members of the present-day 7th and 24th Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiments--stood guard at every archway, not only to honor the flags, but also to keep passers-by from blundering into the rotunda, which was, after all, at the crossroads of a very busy building. All eyes were riveted as each flag was spread out. Almost everyone realized that many of the flags were being seen for the first time in 80 years. Despite the heat, chills ran down spines as mottoes ("Fear Not Death--Fear Dishonor"), bullet holes and bloodstains were revealed to view.

Each flag was photographed and then carried to a work station down the west corridor, where the very first catalogue of the collection was created. Each flag was described, measured, tagged, and wrapped for storage in unbleached muslin, acid-free polyester batting, and acid-free tissue--materials free of damaging acids and chemicals. The flags, now anonymous muslin bundles, were transported to a nearby storage site where, supported in specially-designed racks, they were safe while their fate was decided. There was a sense that temporary storage had bought some time--time to make plans while interest in the capitol was high.

Everyone agreed about the importance of keeping the public informed of the plans developed for the preservation of the collection. Equally important was the need to enlist public understanding and support for the difficult decisions which might have to be made about them. The flags were still potent symbols. They belonged to all the people of Michigan. Decisions which appeared to be hasty, ill-judged or secretive were bound to be--and should be--questioned. So, on June 27, 1990, the first day of the flag removal project, a press conference was held in the rotunda to explain the necessity for the drastic measure. Speakers included Secretary of State Richard Austin; Speaker of the House Lewis Dodak; capitol restoration architect Richard Frank; Civil War historian David Finney; and Jim Lyons, National Secretary for the Sons of Union Veterans. Many others attended, including state veterans organizations and Civil War reenactors. Senator William Sederburg, then Chair of the Michigan Capitol Committee and a driving force behind capitol restoration, chaired the press conference and announced the formation of the Capitol Battle Flags Task Force. The charge of this group was to find answers to the questions raised over and over for years--how to preserve the flags, how to properly exhibit them, and how to inform the public about their importance and meaning. Membership included many who had attended the original meeting: Jerry Lawler, Kerry Chartkoff, Jack DeVine, JoAnne Arasim, David Finney, Maria Quinlan Leiby, Nancy Kless--as well as Dave Koskinen of the House Democratic Communications staff, Vicky Kruckeborg of the Detroit Historical Museum,

Program Analyst Bill Carr, and Ron Means, Director of the Michigan Council for the Humanities. Meetings--and planning--began immediately.

One of the keys to the success of capitol restoration was the formal adoption of a preservation master plan for the building before restoration started. The master plan outlined the scope, goals, standards, assumptions and philosophy of the restoration and guided all important decisions concerning the building over the next three years. It also serves today to guide the ongoing use and maintenance of the capitol. Something similar was needed for the Capitol Battle Flag Collection. Such a preservation plan, formally agreed to by all concerned parties, would establish the standards and goals of the project and present the means by which these goals could be reached.

On the recommendation of Quinlan Leiby, arrangements were made to bring Fonda Thomsen, Director of Textile Preservation Associates, now of Keedysville, Maryland, to the visit the collection. On August 29, 1990, members of the Task Force joined Thomsen at the Historical Museum to evaluate the collection and discuss preliminary plans for its preservation. Thomsen was selected for this task because of her unique qualifications: she had many years of experience in textile conservation with the National Park Service and the Smithsonian. She had served as a consultant to other states--Missouri, Illinois, Maryland, Texas, Florida, and Pennsylvania--exploring ways to conserve their state battle flag collections. She had consulted on the conservation and exhibition of the Star Spangled Banner and many other historic flags. She had written and lectured extensively on the conservation of historic flags and is considered one the nation's leading textile conservators--and the only one to make Civil War battle flags a specialty.

At the conclusion of her visit, Thomsen issued a conservation report which essentially became the master plan for saving the collection. Approved by the Task Force, it has guided all subsequent efforts on behalf of the flags. First Thomsen presented the good news: the collection could be saved. The bad news: it could not be saved if the flags were returned to the rotunda. She pointed out--as others had before--that the crowded, shallow, unevenly-lit rotunda cases were actually contributing to the flags' deterioration. Light was the single biggest culprit. No matter how low the level, light causes deterioration of fragile fabrics. Also, access to the cases for study or maintenance was very difficult and potentially damaging to the flags, while retrofitting the cases to provide doors for easier access was virtually impossible. Nothing could be done to increase the depth of the cases, forcing vertical display highly damaging to aging flags too weak to bear their own weight. Furthermore, the flags were only technically on display: crowding meant that very little could be seen of any particular flag. "Given the problems with case construction; i.e. incorrect lighting, insufficient access, inadequate controls for temperature, humidity and pollution and the lack of sufficient space to exhibit the flags in any manner but vertical and on their staffs, I do not recommend returning the historic flags to the rotunda cases," concluded Thomsen.

But if not in the rotunda, where? And what kinds of treatment would the flags require? The answer surprised many at the time--and continues to surprise many now. The best way to preserve the flags, continued Thomsen, is to do nothing to them at all. The best (and cheapest) treatment is actually no treatment, and the best conservation technique is proper storage. Flags should simply be stored flat in a dark, humidity- and temperature-controlled environment.

Spending dollars on archival storage (that is, storage which protects the collection against dirt, fluctuating humidity levels, light, pollutants, handling, and the acids found in wood and most paper and plastics) would be the best use of our dollars--not expensive and unnecessary treatments to the flags themselves. Furthermore, once the flags were in proper storage, they would be easily accessible for research and study. Thomsen's recommendations were clear: "The environment in which the flags are stored and displayed will determine the long term survival of the collection. Therefore a flat storage system, with each flag on a separate panel, in a controlled environment, is the best conservation treatment that can be realistically achieved. There is no need for actual interventive conservation treatment. Therefore, the first priority for conservation of the collection should be to provide adequate storage."

Archival storage was the key to saving the collection, and flat storage ensured that flags could be studied without folding and unfolding them, highly undesirable when dealing with brittle, painted silk. The real challenge, it was becoming clear, was not in saving flags or even in making them available for study. The real challenge lay in displaying them. Ironically, most of the expensive treatments flags had been subjected to over the years--even when referred to as "preservation" treatments--did nothing at all to extend their lives. Instead, most treatments (including gluing, sewing and other efforts to stabilize them) were really well-meaning but ill-advised attempts to allow large, fragile and often crumbling banners to be displayed. Nonetheless, Thomsen agreed that display was important and the Task Force felt strongly that locking the flags away from the public--even if it preserved them forever--was not acceptable. The challenge was to find a way to display the flags without expensive treatments and without damage to the collection. Thomsen found the answer, again, in the way the flags would be stored.

Thomsen recommended that Michigan follow the approach taken by Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania had designed a storage system--a series of durable and archivally safe stainless steel storage racks--which was at the core of a successful effort to preserve the state's collection of approximately 380 Civil War battle flags. The system was flexible enough to fit any space and could be disassembled and moved if necessary. The flags themselves were stored flat on large anodized aluminum and Tycor (a rigid acid-free paperboard product) panels, one to a panel. The size of the panels, seven feet on a side, eliminated the need to fold and unfold the flags in order to view them. Instead, flags were viewed by sliding the panels out of the storage racks, eliminating the need to touch the flags at all. This system could also be used to display the flags to the public, Thomsen suggested, as flags could be carried to a display area on their panels and exhibited flat without further damage or handling.

Only those flags too fragmentary to allow even this amount of display or too shattered and tangled to lie flat on a panel would require actual conservation treatment. Thomsen recommended either pressure mounting such flags in archival materials (which would also allow easy transportation and mounting on a wall for vertical display) or encapsulation. Encapsulation involved the procedures described by Von Rosenstiel: encasing in Stabiltex, a variety of sheer crepe, by aligning each fragment and then sewing around it by hand to hold it in place. Due to the size and condition of the flags and the amount of hand work involved, such a process is very expensive, easily costing as much as \$10,000 per flag. Thomsen recommended reserving it

for severely deteriorated flags for which there was a great deal of interest. For most of the collection such treatment would be unnecessary.

The Task Force now consisted of Jerry Lawler, Kerry Chartkoff, David Finney, Susan Cooper-Finney (of the Michigan Historical Museum), Jim Lyons, Jack DeVine, Dave Koskinen, Laurie Dickens, Rose Victory, Lowell White (a Civil War reenactor and historian), Pam Newhouse (a graphic artist and Civil War historian), and Linda Rosenthal (a member of the Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War). In the spring of 1991, Kerry Chartkoff visited the Pennsylvania State Capitol to see the storage system Michigan was considering. Following her report, the Task Force endorsed all the provisions of the master plan and began to search for ways to implement it and to make its provisions known to the public. It was clear the project was going to be expensive: construction of a storage system for about 230 flags (since the Spanish American War and World War I flags were also included) was estimated to cost well over \$100,000. Part of the money would be provided by capitol restoration funds, since preserving the building's collections was considered a legitimate part of the project. The Bureau of Michigan History would provide up to \$10,000 and--what was even more important--a place to locate the storage system where the collection would be safe but accessible, since there was no adequate space available in the capitol. The rest of the funds, however, would have to be raised from the public. Could this be done? Would the public contribute to a project which was not going to "restore" battle flags, but rather fund a storage/display system?

David Finney, one of the Task Force members, suggested a way to bring the battle to the attention of the public and enlist its help in saving them. July 4, 1991 would be the 125th anniversary of the original presentation of the flags to the state. Why not reenact that historic event and use the occasion to renew Governor Crapo's pledge to preserve the collection as a lasting memorial to the role Michigan played in the Civil War? The idea quickly took root. Every Civil War reenactment organization in the state was contacted and asked to participate. On July 2, 1991 (July 4th was not practical because many groups had scheduling conflicts), 22 Civil War reenactor groups--including infantry, cavalry, and artillery--gathered on the east lawn of the capitol. Clad in authentic Civil War uniforms and carrying huge silken banners--replicas of the originals which they were pledging to help preserve--the regiments marched in review. Billed as a celebration and rededication of Michigan's Civil War flags on the 125th anniversary of their presentation to the state, the ceremony was a nod to the past. But it was also a nod to the future: it honored all Michigan veterans and launched the statewide campaign "Save The Flags," dedicated to the preservation, research and improved display of the Capitol Battle Flag Collection for coming generations.

The day was hot and humid--especially for the reenactors in woolen uniforms. The capitol's east lawn was filled with regiments drawn up in ranks, fluttering silk banners, Civil War artillery pieces, and women and children in period dress. The 5th Michigan Regiment Band, also in period dress and playing sax-horns, drums and fifes, filled the air with authentic Civil War music. The capitol--in the middle of a very obvious restoration--was draped in bunting. After welcoming remarks provided by master of ceremonies David Finney, the regiments passed in review before Governor John Engler, marching behind their regimental flags. Adjutant General E. Gordon Stump symbolically re-presented the flags to the governor, who once again accepted them on behalf of the state and reaffirmed Governor Crapo's pledge. Remarks were also offered by Secretary of State Richard Austin; Task Force member James Lyons, National Secretary of

the Sons of Union veterans of the Civil War; and John Freeman, Chair of the Commander's Group of the State of Michigan. Freeman represented Michigan's contemporary veterans' organizations, who brought their own flags to provide a color guard in honor of Michigan's historic battle flags.

A highlight of the ceremony was the unveiling of a magnificent poster, featuring color photographs of 17 of the nearly 160 Civil War flags in the collection. It also included a rare original photo of the battle flags of the 22nd Michigan Infantry at their 50th reunion in 1917 in Pontiac, hand-tinted for the poster. The poster was designed by Susan Cooper-Finney, while the concept was developed by Saralee Howard. The text was written and title chosen by Kerry Chartkoff. Funded by the Michigan Capitol Committee, the sale of the poster (at \$10 each) was applied entirely to the flag preservation fund.

The ceremony concluded by singing "The Battle-Cry of Freedom" accompanied by the 5th Michigan Regiment Band. As the words, "Yes, we'll rally round the flag, boys, we'll rally once again," floated across Capitol Square, as it once did across many an almost-forgotten battlefield, it brought home to everyone the challenge and importance of the task which lay ahead.

One of the first challenges was that of fundraising. Sales of the poster were brisk, but a great deal more was needed to meet goals. Noting that there was considerable interest in the flags of specific regiments among reenactors and descendants, the idea of encouraging such individuals and groups to consider "adopting" "their" flags for a substantial contribution of \$1,000 was proposed. Families descended from Civil War volunteers, for example, could "adopt" the very flag their ancestor had fought under or perhaps carried into battle. Adopting flags in the name of ancestors provided a very appropriate way to preserve the memory of men whose names do not always figure prominently in the history books, but whose histories were, nonetheless, remarkable.

The very first adoption took place on October 25, 1991, when the Downing family gathered at the capitol in Lansing to be honored for their adoption of a battle flag carried by the 3rd Michigan Regiment Volunteer Infantry, the very flag their ancestor, Walter Mundell, fought under. Mundell won the Congressional Medal of Honor for capturing an enemy flag at Sailor's Creek, Virginia, on April 6, 1865. By adopting a flag in his name, his family preserved his memory, his flag, and Michigan history.

Since then, many adoption ceremonies have taken place. Some have been held in the rotunda of the state capitol, where the flags had hung for so long. Others have taken place throughout the state in city halls, schools and public parks. Several reenactment organizations pledged to adopt all of "their" regiments' flags. Among those who met their goals was the 24th Michigan Infantry, which adopted six flags. From the beginning, reenactors have been the backbone of the project: their enthusiastic support and spirit of cooperation ensured its success.

Although the most obvious benefit was financial, another soon became evident. None of the adoptions represented large donations from wealthy but anonymous corporations or individuals. Instead, they represent months—and in some cases even years--of fundraising by reenactors who held drawings and car washes, raffled off quilts, and sold posters on consignment, or by the fourth graders at Mattawan Later Elementary School who worked all year to raise \$2,000 from

the sale of authentic Civil War crafts they made themselves. Over a period of several years, Mattawan students would eventually raise \$8,000 for Save The Flags. From the beginning, Save The Flags has truly been a grass roots project supported by the genuine interest and concern of the public.

Adoption ceremonies became an opportunity to educate the public about the true meaning of the flags, their use in war, and the means necessary to preserve them. With each adoption, those involved became invested in the project and emerged its strongest supporters. Slowly, word spread until adoptions were being sponsored by groups as far away as California and Great Britain and requests for information and advice poured in from other states with similar collections to care for.

Another benefit emerged from sharing the project with the public: invaluable information poured in. It soon became clear that the project was saving not only artifacts, but the history they represented. Flag history is not easy to find. It is buried in newspaper accounts, in letters home, in diaries and reminiscences. Sifting through this mass of material for information on 230 flags--information necessary to make the flags meaningful today--is far beyond the reach of the most dedicated single researcher. Instead, information donated by members of the Task Force, descendants, reenactors, and historians all over the country, who stumble across flag stories while researching ancestors, regiments, and battles, has created a valuable archive which can be shared with others. Our hats are off to all contributors--of information or funds--who have made Save The Flags one of the most successful grass roots historic preservation projects in the country.

Meanwhile, the Task Force had other decisions to make. Capitol restoration had reached the rotunda, ringed by now-empty flag cases. Since returning the battle flags to the rotunda was no longer an option, what should become of the cases? Should they be removed? Or should replica flags fill them in order to preserve the rotunda's historic appearance and honor the capitol's Civil War heritage? The decision had to be made soon, for the restoration was proceeding on schedule. Gala celebrations were already being planned for the completion and rededication of the capitol in the fall of 1992. Time was of the essence.

The Task Force felt that replicas should be made. In the fall of 1990, Kerry Chartkoff took on the job of finding out how to make them. There were many issues to resolve. Should replicas be made of all 230 flags, or just the Civil War flags? How much should be spent? Chartkoff discovered that exact replicas were very expensive: hand painted or embroidered on silk, they cost at least \$1,000 each, and often much more. Should the state spend over \$230,000 to create replicas while the real flags languished for lack of funds? There was also that restoration deadline. Making a single flag by hand could take months: making 230 flags by the summer of 1992 was clearly an impossibility. Efforts were made to find someone in Michigan who might take on the task as a labor of love, but no one was found who could meet the demands of the project. An additional problem arose: how does one create an exact replica of a battle flag, torn to pieces on the fields of war? After spending the time and money to create it, do you then riddle it with shot and shell? Do you stain it with blood, sweat, smoke, rain and dirt? And if you did, would the public mistake them for the real flags?

It was clear that exact replicas were out of the question. They were probably unnecessary in any event: little could be seen of the original flags in the cases--and little would be seen of their replacements. Decisions were made to create "generic" replicas, of nylon rather than silk, and to machine-appliqué regimental designations and mottoes rather than to paint or embroider them. No effort was made to recreate battle damage. Within these constraints, every effort was made to honor the original flag: sizes were accurate, colors and patterns carefully followed. Only the Civil War flags would be represented in the restored capitol, for they were the ones the building was constructed--in part--to house. And, rather than replicate all 160 Civil War flags, only 80 were made, since the flags in the back row of each case could not be seen in any event.

After an exhaustive but unsuccessful search for an in-state manufacturer--hampered by the unprecedented demand for American flags resulting from the Desert Storm War--the contract for creating 80 replicas of Michigan Civil War battle flags was awarded in February 1991 to The Color Guard of Folly Hill, Pennsylvania, a firm which had made replicas for the Pennsylvania State House, as well as for museums and historic sites around the country. The average price, depending on size and complexity, was \$300 each. Rather than \$230,000 or more, the project spent about \$24,000, with the funds coming from capitol restoration. Over the next year, the replicas were created and shipped to Michigan.

Finally the scaffolding in the rotunda came down, the cases were cleaned and refurbished and, on October 22, 1992, a modern "Iron Brigade" descended on the capitol. Organized by Task Force member Linda Rosenthal, members of the Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War came to the capitol--irons in hand--to press each of the 80 replica flags and mount them on staffs in preparation for installation in the rotunda cases. Each ironer was a direct descendant of a Civil War veteran. Several were descendants of members of the 102nd U.S. Infantry, a black regiment. Two were descendants (one 93 years old!) of Walter Mundell of the 3rd Michigan Infantry, and ironed the replica of the flag they had adopted the previous year.

Worries that replicas would look garishly new or out-of-place in the restored rotunda were soon put to rest. Even with new staffs and generic finials, the draped the flags convey an authentic appearance, while making no effort to deceive the viewer. The original glass panels covering the cases were screwed back into place in early November and the capitol was ready for its rededication to the people of Michigan on November 19, 1992. Plans ultimately call for replacing "generic" flag replicas with more accurate copies as funds allow.

In the meantime, in the spring of 1992 the Task Force had undertaken another challenge: that of designing and contracting for the archival storage system recommended in the master plan--the storage system which would make the preservation of the collection possible. Again, primary responsibility for this part of the project was undertaken by Kerry Chartkoff.

One of the reasons the Pennsylvania system was so attractive was that it was flexible—that is, capable of being easily moved and reassembled and reconfigured to fit different space requirements. This was important because, at that time, no one knew exactly where the system would be located. Floor space and ceiling height of the final storage area were only two of many variables which could not be predicted. Since the panels at the heart of the system had to be seven feet on a side to accommodate 6 by 6 1/2 feet flags, a great deal of floor space was needed. There was a practical limit to the height of the racks and, therefore, a limited number of flags

which could be stored in each. After much figuring, Chartkoff decided that the height between each panel would be 4 inches (to allow for tassels which were often more than 3 inches in diameter). And, since it was not practical to design racks too high (since access to panels higher than one's head was too difficult), eleven racks 92 inches tall were planned, each holding 22 flags, for a total capacity of 242 flags, which allow some growth in the collection.

Eleven racks seven feet plus on a side take up a lot of space. One had to remember, too, that there had to be enough room to completely draw the panels out of the racks. And, since the system required detaching the flags from their staffs, there had to be room to store the staffs as well. The flags were still in temporary storage--still bundled on their staffs. Where would the storage system be located? There was no room in the capitol. Whichever institution volunteered such space would be making a considerable sacrifice. The question was answered when the Michigan Historical Museum of the Bureau of Michigan History agreed that the flags should be located within its facility, and that preserving them was part of their mission. Located only a few blocks from the capitol, controlled access to the collection could be provided. Conservators and historians were on hand, and an environmentally-controlled space was possible. Nevertheless, it meant giving up an enormous portion of their rotating exhibit space for this purpose--at least temporarily--while a more permanent location within the Museum was found.

Great effort was made to locate an in-state supplier for the system. However, in the end, the contract was awarded in August 1992 to the same supplier which manufactured the Pennsylvania system: InterMetro Industries Corporation of Pennsylvania, with offices in Troy, Michigan. The project, which involved fabricating custom components to exacting standards, was either too large or too small for most suppliers--or too experimental. However, InterMetro won the contract for the custom milled stainless steel racks only.

The panels were another story. It was extremely difficult to find any company willing to take on this part of the project. Specifications called for panels constructed of Tycor, a rigid honeycomb acid-free paperboard product, held together by anodized aluminum frames. The result was a strong but lightweight panel, perfect for storing and displaying the flags. Finally, the contract was awarded in August 1992 to John Ruggirello of Ridgeco, in East Lansing, Michigan. John, a young entrepreneur with no previous experience in this area but with a great deal of confidence and determination, spent the following fall and winter hand-fabricating the panels to exacting standards in his garage-turned-workshop. Ruggirello accomplished his task superbly, but he was unable to complete his contract until spring 1993, delaying the Task Force's original plan to have the racks and pallets in place at the Museum--and the flags installed in them--by October or early November 1992.

That was not to be, but in early October 1992 a very important step was taken: the flags were moved from temporary storage to the fourth floor of the Museum, where they were housed until the storage system arrived. In mid-October, the racks arrived and were assembled under the direction of Chris Hargrove of the Capitol Facilities staff and Craig Thomas of InterMetro. A space created in the temporary exhibit area now contained the storage racks. It would be spring 1993, however, before the pallets started arriving. Finally the Task Force and Museum staff could move to the final phase of this particular project: unwrapping each flag, carefully removing the staff, installing each flag on a pallet, and--since the flags could now be studied in greater detail--recataloguing each flag. The process was slow, exacting, tedious, time-

consuming--and exciting. Nothing could be hurried. The “depoling” team, consisting of volunteers from the Task Force (Kerry Chartkoff, Pam Newhouse, Linda Rosenthal), in addition to Museum staff (Rose Victory, Laurie Dickens, Lisa Kost) who directed the process, carefully teased each brittle silken flag from its staff. Flags were not attached by leather tabs, as they often are today. Instead, most were nailed directly through the sleeve onto the staff. Sometimes it was necessary to prize a dozen or more reluctant nails or brads from the sleeve before the flag could be released, and then the process was often hampered by bullet-shattered staffs whose splinters caught at the papery silk. At last the flags could be fully examined and combed for clues about their history. It was with great satisfaction that each flag, covered by a layer of acid-free tissue, finally slid into a storage rack, accompanied by its cord and tassels. Nearby, the staffs and finials were placed a special rack. All components: flag, cord and tassels, staff and finial were catalogued so they could be properly reunited at any time. Finally, all Civil War, Spanish-American War and World War I flags which make up the Capitol Battle Flag Collection were in proper archival storage.

While Save The Flags was achieving its primary goal--that of preserving the collection--members of the Task Force turned their attention to another major goal--that of sharing the meaning and histories of the flags with the public. The Capitol Battle Flags Task Force, by 1994, consisted of Jerry Lawler, Kerry Chartkoff, Kent and Judy Armstrong, Susan Cooper-Finney, Jack DeVine, Laurie Dickens, Dave Downing, Lois Downing, David Finney, John and Pam Gibney, Larry Houghton, Dave Koskinen, Maria Quinlan Leiby, Jim Lyons, Pam Newhouse, Linda Rosenthal, Matt Van Acker, Mary Jo Verran, Rose Victory and Lowell White. The idea of publishing a book illustrated with color photographs of each flag had long been proposed. In 1994, some members--Jerry Lawler, Kerry Chartkoff, Kent Armstrong, Susan Cooper-Finney, David Finney, Dave Downing, Lois Downing, John Gibney, Larry Houghton, Pam Newhouse, Linda Rosenthal, Mary Jo Verran, Matt Van Acker and Lowell White--formed a Capitol Battle Flag Book Task Force to pursue this goal. This book is the result of that effort.

Task Force members often went far beyond simply serving in an advisory capacity. A notable example occurred on the evening of October 7, 1993. Lois and Everett Downing, joined by their son Dave and members of the 7th Michigan Infantry Regiment, had convinced Ted Turner to allow a special premiere showing of the film “Gettysburg” in a theater in Lansing before the film was shown on television. Many Michigan reenactors numbered in the more than 4,000 which appeared in the movie, and they were eager to see the movie on a big screen. Tickets--at \$10 each--sold like hotcakes. The Downings filled the house and raised almost \$3,000 for Save The Flags!

Another surprising development was the unexpected acquisition of several “new” flags: the collection had begun to grow. On Tuesday, June 8, 1993, in the Governor’s Parlor in the capitol at Lansing, a very special ceremony took place. Father John Hardy and Sister Frances Claire of Monroe presented Governor John Engler with the flag their father, a color bearer in the Second Michigan Volunteer Infantry, carried during the Civil War. Father Hardy was 83 and Sister Frances Claire 97, and the flag had been presented to their father, John C. Hardy, by War Governor Austin Blair himself. Known as the “Hero of Fort Steadman” for his bravery at Petersburg, Captain Hardy was only 23 when he captured over 35 rebels virtually single-handed and helped the Second Michigan defeat Robert E. Lee’s final offensive of the war. Although offers had been made to buy the flag, Father Hardy and Sister Frances Claire felt it belonged to

the state and people of Michigan. However, they had one stipulation: the flag had been presented to their father by a Michigan governor. They wanted to close the circle--over 130 years later--by personally presenting the flag back to a Michigan governor. On June 8, surrounded by historians, dignitaries, members of the Flag Task Force, and members of the Second Michigan Volunteer Infantry reenactment organization (who served as honor guard and also presented the Task Force with a \$1,000 check to adopt a flag of the Second Michigan already in the collection), Sister Frances Claire handed the flag to Governor Engler. The flag had been officially returned to the state. One of the members of the Second Michigan said, "This is the most important historic preservation event of my life."

At almost the same time, another effort, endorsed by Save The Flags, was attempting to bring home two battle flags of the Fifth Michigan Cavalry, flags carried by Colonel Smith Hastings of Quincy, Michigan, a Congressional Medal of Honor winner for action taken during the Civil War. The Fifth Michigan Cavalry fought under George Armstrong Custer. Smith H. Hastings, from Coldwater, enlisted in the Fifth Michigan Cavalry on August 30, 1862. He won the medal for an action at Newby's Cross Roads, Virginia in 1863, when, as a 19-year-old captain, he defied orders to abandon the battery's guns assigned to the regiment and retreat. His defiance saved the guns, but Custer gave credit to another, and it was not until 32 years after the war that the record was set straight. Called one of the most daring officers of the Michigan Cavalry Brigade, Smith Hastings eventually rose to command the Fifth Michigan Cavalry. Although he moved to Colorado after the war, he never forgot his regiment. Found carefully preserved among his effects after his death were two silk Fifth Michigan Cavalry battle flags (one signed by Smith Hastings himself) and a number of other artifacts. Eventually the collection made its way to California. Now an opportunity had arisen to purchase the collection and bring it home to Michigan.

On July 10, 1993, a meeting was held at the Michigan Historical Museum to form a Fifth Michigan Cavalry Flag Ad Hoc Fundraising Committee. Chaired by David Finney and including Flags Task Force members Kerry Chartkoff and Kent Armstrong, as well as Bette Hulbert of the Museum, Don Schwarck (a teacher and Civil War writer who first learned of the flags and brought them to the attention of the state), representatives of veterans groups, and many others, discussion centered around how to raise \$25,000--the amount the current owners stipulated. Also, there was a deadline: October 15, 1993. After that, the flags would be sent to auction.

Right from the first Save The Flags was separated from the fundraising efforts being undertaken by the Ad Hoc Committee. No Save The Flags donations or funds would be used to purchase the flags, no matter how valuable they might be. All money donated by the public to preserve the Capitol Battle Flag Collection would be used for just that, not to purchase flags. When the flags did come home to Michigan, however, they would join those already in the Capitol Collection.

On November 8, 1993, at a gala celebration at the Historical Museum, the flags did, finally, come home, assisted by hundreds of donations both large and small. The sale of tickets to a special Michigan Civil War Day on September 18, 1993 at the Michigan Historical Museum, featuring special exhibits and speakers (including Dr. Gregory Urwin, author of Custer Victorious, a highly-regarded scholarly treatment of Custer's Civil War history), had helped the committee meet its goals. Glasses were raised in salute. The collection had grown by two.

It was expected that additional flags might join the collection from time to time, so some expansion was planned. No one knows exactly how many flags were carried by Michigan regiments during the war--and no one knows how many may be still out there. Not all flags were returned to the state in 1866 and even today some may remain in private hands. As knowledge of Save The Flags became more widespread, owners might be inspired to donate such flags to the state so they could be properly preserved and shared by all. Small or private museums might find they could not care for a flag which found its way into their collections, or might feel that the flag was not an appropriate part of their collection. It is important to recall, however, that acquiring flags is not the primary goal of Save The Flags. Far more important is capturing the information they represent, as well as helping small museums and private owners to properly preserve these invaluable artifacts while teaching them about their meaning and importance.

With some goals reached, attention could now be turned toward the conservation of flags so deteriorated, shattered, and tangled that further treatment was needed. On February 10, 1994, the Michigan Capitol Committee passed a resolution authorizing the expenditure of Save The Flags funds for the conservation of individual flags in the collection, selected on the basis of the severity of their condition. On January 27, 1995, the first Michigan Civil War battle flag was sent to Fonda Thomsen for conservation. Because of its condition, the flag's regiment was unknown. It was hoped that conservation would provide the necessary clues. The flag was fully conserved, including archival cleaning, detailed analysis, stabilization and hand-encapsulation in Stabiltex. Unfortunately, the flag remains an "unknown," but no longer languishes in dead storage, a tangled mass of silk and fringe.

On March 23, 1995, a second flag was sent for conservation. This was a blue regimental carried by the 24th Michigan Infantry. When it was finally rolled flat by the conservators, this particular flag revealed a surprise, hidden for untold years. It contained a twelve inch wide strip of a second flag, which proved to belong to a flag carried by a completely different regiment--the 22nd Michigan Infantry. We were able to reunite the strip with its parent flag. Since that time, further flags have been sent for conservation as funds allowed: who knows what future surprises await?

In March 1996, another goal of Save The Flags was met. First the flags (still on their panels) were temporarily removed from their racks. Then the racks were broken down and reassembled in a new, permanent home. Finally, the flags were reinstalled. The storage system had met its first test, and the collection was now permanently in place in an environmentally-controlled room, configured just for them. Proper lighting, humidity control and a convenient location where the flags are accessible but protected means that everything is in place to ensure the long-term survival of the collection, while avoiding the pitfalls of obscurity. A major concern had been the fear that the collection--once removed from the public eye--might be forgotten and eventually lost. With a flag storage and study room dedicated to the collection, this becomes a much more unlikely possibility.

One last component of the Save The Flags project remained: sharing the meaning and history of these remarkable artifacts with the public. On Flag Day, June 14, 1996, an exhibit opened at the Michigan Historical Museum titled, "Rally Round The Flags." Over a period of almost a year, 56 flags were displayed, 14 at a time on a rotating basis, along with exhibits designed to explain their meaning, use and history. The exhibit was a great success: it was probably the first time the public had really been able to see the flags in any detail since they were returned to the state in

1866. Another effort to bring the flags to the public and, in particular, to the schoolchildren of the state, took place in 1999 when Michigan Government Television produced a video, "Oh, Could They But Speak!," for broadcast on cable television. Focused on the story of Abel Peck and the flag of the 24th Michigan Infantry Regiment at Gettysburg, the video's target audience included fourth graders studying Michigan history. Since then, the video and the flags have become an integral part of the Michigan Historical Museum's "Big History Lesson," in which fourth grade classes spend up to week at the Museum studying history behind the scenes. The flags have proven to be valuable teaching tools, instrumental in exciting students of all ages about the past, not just in terms of dates and places, but in terms of the convictions, passions and emotions which motivated over 90,000 Michigan men to volunteer for war.

Save The Flags is the culmination of the efforts of thousands of volunteers who have worked to save the flags, a project begun on a shoestring and carried forward through hard work and determination. If Governor Blair and Governor Crapo, Adjutant General Robertson and Frederick Schneider could see the Michigan Capitol Battle Flag Collection today, they would know that Michigan has not forgotten.

