

SAVE THE FLAGS ADOPTION PROGRAM

One of the greatest successes of Save The Flags has been its “adoption” program. For a donation of \$1,000 individuals, organizations, schools, families and communities can help with the preservation, research and display of the flags by “adopting” flags in the collection. To date, almost 150 flags--mostly from the Civil War--have been adopted, providing the project with much-needed funds.

Adoptions also help preserve history by commemorating particular regiments and individuals. Adoptions are often made in the name of the original regiment which carried that flag into battle, or a flag may be adopted in the name of a veteran by his descendants.

Those adopting flags are honored by a special ceremony, a photograph of the flag they have adopted, a legislative tribute signed by the governor and members of the state legislature and a plaque honoring the adoption on the “Roll of Honor” displayed at the state historical museum, where the flags are housed and displayed.

The money raised benefits the entire collection. Humidity, light, handling and dirt must be controlled, and the flags must not come into contact with plastic, wood, or paper. Custom designed (and very expensive) acid-free stainless steel and anodized aluminum storage and display units have been designed--partially funded by Save The Flags--and the flags installed. By doing so, the ongoing deterioration of the flags has been stopped.

In another phase of the project, individual flags so fragmentary and fragile that they cannot be safely viewed or studied are being sent one at a time--as funds allow--to America’s top battle flag conservators at the Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan and also by Textile Preservation Associates. There, the conservators carefully enclose the brittle silken fragments between layers of a sheer acid-free material which allows the flag to be safely viewed and studied. This meticulous work is done entirely by hand, sewing around—not through--the actual flag to anchor each tiny scrap. The results are spectacular, but the process is very expensive: depending on the size and condition of the flag, such treatment can cost thousands of dollars per flag and sometimes much more!

Fortunately, many of Michigan’s flags do not require this treatment. Even so, the money needed to fully stabilize all the flags in the collection will ultimately amount to several hundred thousand dollars. A more specific cost is not possible because every flag is different, and the cost depends on the size and condition of each flag. Our approach: take one flag at a time!

One of the most important benefits of the project has been the opportunity for people all over Michigan (indeed from all over the country) to participate in saving these fragile links to the past—and to learn from them. No other artifact of the Civil War evokes more awe than the very battle flags Michigan men carried and fought under. We often point out that we are not just saving artifacts, no matter how interesting and beautiful, but history itself.

Today, Save The Flags is one of the most successful grass roots historic preservation projects in the country and a model for flag preservation projects everywhere. If you are considering “adopting” a flag and would like to learn more please feel free to contact:

Matt Van Acker

Save The Flags, Co-Chair

517/373-5157 or email at mvanacker@legislature.mi.gov