

State Historical Society of Iowa

Public can “Adopt a Flag” at Historical Museum historic properties

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(DES MOINES) – Deep in the thunderous chaos of battle, Iowa’s Civil War battle flags provided an identity and a point of pride for the soldiers who rallied to save the Union.

Now, as the flags face a second battle – this time against the forces of time and deterioration – the State Historical Society of Iowa is calling on Civil War descendents, re-enactors and history buffs of all stripes to consider making a contribution to SHSI’s “Adopt a Flag” program. The program supports SHSI’s historic battle flag collection, which includes more than 200 flags borne by Iowa regiments and batteries during the Civil War, Spanish-American War and World War I.

“We have the ability to save these flags for future generations,” SHSI battle flag conservator Sheila Hanke said. “But with the substantial cost of stabilization work, we must always be mindful of budgetary constraints when we plan our conservation efforts. The ‘Adopt a Flag’ program is an opportunity for interested donors to help speed up the preservation process on a particular flag by granting us the financial power necessary to move quickly.”

Potential donors can consider several levels of support as part of the “Adopt a Flag” program. Each level qualifies the donor for certain benefits.

Donations ranging from \$500 to \$999 – the “Battalion” level of support – qualify the donor for a certificate with an image of the sponsored flag, a battle flag poster, access to an exclusive online message board, a set of battle flag postcards, listing in permanent exhibit signage, and a tour of the battle flag preservation lab for up to 10 people.

Donations at the “Regiment” level, which range from \$1,000 to \$4,999, qualify the donor for “Battalion” level benefits, two tours of the preservation lab, and an invitation to a private preview reception to open flag exhibits.

Donors at the “Brigade” level, from \$5,000 to \$9,999, receive a personal appearance by a State Historical Museum curator or conservator alongside all “Regiment Level” benefits.

Donors at the “Division” level, from \$10,000 to \$49,999, receive “Brigade” level benefits and the right to name an Iowa Battle Flag cabinet.

Finally, donors at the “Corps” level of \$50,000 or more receive “Brigade” level benefits and the naming rights to the Iowa Battle Flag Preservation Lab.

“We think the most significant reward of this program,” Hanke said, “is knowing you’ve played a major role in stabilizing these flags, which really are incredibly fragile.”

The cost to stabilize a single Civil War battle flag is at least \$4,800 or more, depending on the amount of damage. It is a tedious and delicate process performed by highly trained and skilled conservators. The process of preserving a flag takes a skilled conservator like Hanke up to 240 hours. During the process, up to 8,000 stitches must be individually cut and lifted from flags to remove gauze from a previous conservation attempt in the 1890s.

When conservators finish their work, they mount each flag in a compression frame under a UV-filtering and scratch-resistant Luxan shield. Each framed flag, weighing between 200 and 250 pounds, will be rotated in and out of public exhibition.

To find out more about the “Adopt a Flag” program, please contact SHSI at 515-281-5111.

The State Historical Society of Iowa is a trustee of Iowa’s historical legacy and an advocate for understanding Iowa’s past. It identifies, records, collects, preserves, manages and provides access to Iowa’s historical resources. Its dual mission of preservation and education serves Iowans of all ages, conducts and stimulates research, disseminates information, and encourages and supports historical preservation and education efforts of others throughout the state. Please visit www.iowahistory.org or call 515-281-5111 for more information.

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