

State Historical Society of Iowa

Iowa Civil War Battle Flag Project to Receive Donations from Iowa Military and Battle Flag Groups

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What: Meeting of the Des Moines Civil War Roundtable & Check Presentation

When: 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, March 30, 2005

Where: State Historical Society of Iowa, 600 E. Locust Street, Des Moines, IA 50319

Photo Opportunity: The media is invited and encouraged to cover the check presentation.

Members of the Des Moines Civil War Roundtable will be joined by the the 2nd Iowa Battery and the Army of the Southwest to present checks to the State Historical Society of Iowa's Battle Flag Project as part of its meeting and banquet Wednesday, March 30, 2005 at the State Historical Building. The funds will be used to help the Battle Flag Project, which is responsible for the assessment, stabilization and preservation of about 260 Iowa Civil War battle flags. Several participants will be dressed in Civil War-period uniforms and other apparel.

The meeting will also include a State Historical Museum Curator presentation about the Civil War exhibit, "Honor the Colors: Iowa's Civil War Battle Flags," and a presentation about the Iowa Battle Flag project's progress.

More than half of the male population of Iowa served in the Civil War (1860-1865). In the Honor the Colors exhibit, they tell who they were, how they were equipped and how they felt about the flags they followed into battle. Featured in the exhibit are the original battle flags from the Society's collection. Original equipment, period prints, paintings and uniforms are also on display.

In January 2000, Fonda Thomsen, a leading flag conservation specialist, conducted a survey of flags in the capitol, state historical museum, the State Historical Society of Iowa's

Centennial Building, and the Iowa Gold Star Museum at Camp Dodge. The results of her survey and recommendations were reported to Governor Vilsack and members of the General Assembly. She recommended a strategy to study and stabilize the flags, retrofit exhibit cases in the capitol for rotational display, and to provide for on-going care. This plan will take about four years and cost about \$1.2 million.

The 78th General Assembly appropriated \$150,000 in 2000 to begin work. It was determined the first phase of work should focus on 85 flags in the collection of the State Historical Society of Iowa. Flags from the Centennial Building were transported to the museum in September 2000, specialized textile storage cabinets were obtained, and project staff was hired. Actual work on the flag collection began in January 2001. The stabilization treatment and physical documentation are completed on-site by the Collections Manager/Flag Conservator.

In 2001 the responsibility for the battle flag collection in the capitol was assigned to the State Historical Society of Iowa by the Iowa legislature. Additional funds for the first phase of work on the collection in the capitol were recommended by Governor Vilsack and approved by the legislature in April 2001. This phase of work commenced in January 2002. Due to the State of Iowa budget crisis, funding for the project was reduced to \$100,000 and the position of Project Historian was eliminated.

In October 2002, the State Historical Society of Iowa received a \$144,000 Save America's Treasures grant to help fund the Iowa Battle Flag Preservation Project. Save America's Treasures is a national effort to protect America's threatened cultural treasures, including historic structures, collections, works of art, and maps and journals that document and illuminate the history and culture of the United States.

"I am pleased by the national recognition and support for this important effort to preserve these historical flags," said Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack. "We are sending an important message by preserving these valued treasures, which are part of our heritage because they represent what is great about our state and our country."

The funding sought from the State of Iowa will be used to stabilize the collection. Additional funding will be needed to conduct more extensive preservation treatments on specific flags. The Iowa Historical Foundation, the private fund-raising arm of the State Historical Society of Iowa, has established a restricted account to receive contributions for the flag project. Individuals, veteran's organizations, and many Civil War living historians have already made contributions to the project.

For information on making a contribution to the Civil War Battle Flag project, please contact the Iowa Historical Foundation, 600 E. Locust, Des Moines, Iowa 50319 or 515-281-5111.