

# State Historical Society of Iowa

## Iowa Battle Flags to be removed from Capitol

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**DES MOINES, Iowa-** The tattered Civil War battle flags that stand as the cornerstones to the Iowa Capitol rotunda have attracted the attention of visitors since being placed there in 1896. Unfortunately, the years have left the flags in very poor condition and in need of conservation.

On Wednesday, Jan. 23, State Historical Society of Iowa curators and a renowned flag preservationist will begin removing the flags and transporting them to the State Historical Building where restoration work will occur as the second phase of the State Historical Society's Battle Flag Preservation Project.

A brief ceremony will begin at 9 a.m. in the rotunda. The ceremony includes an honor guard of Civil War reenactors; Gary Hucksford of Marengo who will play the bugle; National Guard Chaplain Lynn Williams who will say a prayer for the fallen; and recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

The first flags to be removed are in the northeast alcove. They include 31st through the 40th regiments and the 1st Iowa Regiment of African Descent, later known as the 60th U.S. Colored Infantry. Each flag must be handled individually and laid flat on sheets of archival tyvek, with the staffs removed. The flags will then be rolled for transport to the State Historical Building. The process could take several weeks.

"Each flag has its own character which will cause it to take its own time," said Jerome Thompson, museum director at the State Historical Building. "The flags have never been documented and no one has ever seen what they look like. The physical documentation is a very important part of the preservation process." Fonda Thomsen, a leading flag conservation specialist, will be on hand to advise in the removal of the flags. Thomsen has extensive experience in textile conservation and has consulted on many similar battle flag preservation projects in Michigan, Ohio, Texas and Alabama.

Basic stabilization on the first set of flags will take approximately one year. Enhanced treatment will depend upon additional funding which is being sought from private funds while

the stabilization costs are being requested from the Iowa Legislature. Depending on funding, it will take four to five years to do the basic stabilization work on the 181 flags from the Civil War, Spanish American War and World War I housed in the Capitol, Thompson said. The final phase of work will involve retrofitting the cases in the rotunda to permit a rotational exhibition of the flags.

For complete information on the State Historical Society of Iowa's Battle Flag Preservation Project, visit [www.iowaflags.org](http://www.iowaflags.org).

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