

Michigan Time Traveler

An educational supplement produced by Lansing Newspapers In Education, Inc. and the Michigan Historical Center.

KIDS' History

Flags of the Civil War

Flags are treasured symbols of our nation. This month's Time Traveler looks at a special collection of flags—Michigan flags from the Civil War.

Michigan's Flags

Let us, then, tenderly deposit them, as sacred relics, in the archives of our State, there to stand forever, her proudest possession—a revered incentive to liberty and patriotism, and a constant rebuke and terror to oppression and treason.

—Governor Henry H. Crapo (1866)

Civil War flags were important to soldiers who fought in the war—they represented home as well as the fight for the Union. After the war, these flags symbolized the sacrifice of war.

In 1866, Michigan's Governor Henry Crapo asked soldiers to return their battle flags to the people of Michigan as a lasting memorial to their service. The soldiers returned 122 flags. The flags were stored in Detroit until the completion of our present Capitol in Lansing in 1878. Today they are conserved and preserved in special storage at the Michigan Historical Center.

The Captured Flags

Thirteen of the flags in the Michigan collection were not Michigan flags. They had been captured from Confederate troops. Michigan kept these flags for a long time. On September 20, 1941, Governor Van Wagoner presented the captured Confederate battle flags to twelve southern states.

Maynard Hill, a journalist for the *Lansing State Journal*, wrote the following account. This occurred just a few months before Japanese planes attacked the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor and the United States entered World War II.



General Julius F. Howell, 95-year-old Commander-in-Chief of the United Confederate Veterans, expresses the gratitude of Tennessee as Governor Van Wagoner waits with the old battle flags. (State Archives of Michigan)

Saturday afternoon, in one of the most colorful open-air ceremonies ever held here, Michigan returned to the southern states the 13 flags and three swords captured by her troops from Confederate armies 75 years ago.

The rites were staged on the east steps of the Capitol. A bright sun beamed down as Governor Van Wagoner and the official representatives of 12 southern states pledged a new order of fellowship in the defense of their common democracy against dangers from abroad. . . .

"Today," said Governor Van Wagoner, "...we rededicate ourselves to defending the fundamentals of our lives, our liberties, and our common happiness. As we watch above the ramparts of our liberties, through the darkly seen trials ahead, through this new test of national unity, may these symbols of honor, and courage, and gallantry, and devotion serve to remind us, through every night, that our flag is and always will be, there."



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A Mystery Flag

In 1951, Milton Devinney and his mother donated his great grandfather's souvenirs from the Civil War—records, letters, photographs and a flag—to the State Archives of Michigan. Three weeks later an arsonist set fire to the building that housed the archives. Everyone assumed that the donation was destroyed.

As he grew older, Milton thought about his great grandfather more and more. His name was Henry Seage. He enlisted in the Fourth Infantry Volunteer Regiment in Hudson on September 27, 1861. He was promoted to color sergeant in 1863. He survived the war. That was unusual because the enemy shot at flag bearers first, so many died.

During the war, Seage wrote letters home and regularly kept a diary. While living in Lansing after the war, he became the historian for his regiment. He also gave speeches about the war.

This spring Devinney asked once more whether any of his grandfathers' things had been found. Museum curators assumed that the flag that



Henry Seage (Courtesy of Steve Roberts—Descendant of Henry Seage)

Devinney was looking for was a Fourth Infantry Volunteer Regiment battle flag. Curators searched the collection but did not find it.

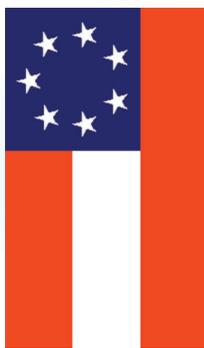
Several months passed. As Michigan Historical Museum Curator of Collections Rose Victory and Registrar Lisa Konieczny inventoried some old boxes of artifacts, they found an "orphan" flag. Made of silk, it had gold stars in a circle in a blue canton and three wide red and white stripes: "Stars and Bars." It was a Confederate flag—a civilian flag, not a battle flag.

They called Kerry Chartkoff, Chair, Save The Flags and Capitol Historian, and Matt Van Arker, Acting Director, Capitol Tour and Information Service, to identify this flag. When curators unfolded the flag for them, they saw these words written on the flag: "Part of a Reb Flag. Captured at Fredericksburg, Va. December 13th, 1862." Then, Matt noticed the word "Seage" stamped in ink on it. He said, "I know that name."

At once, Kerry Chartkoff contacted Milton Devinney! In June 2003, Milton Devinney identified the flag he had longed to see.



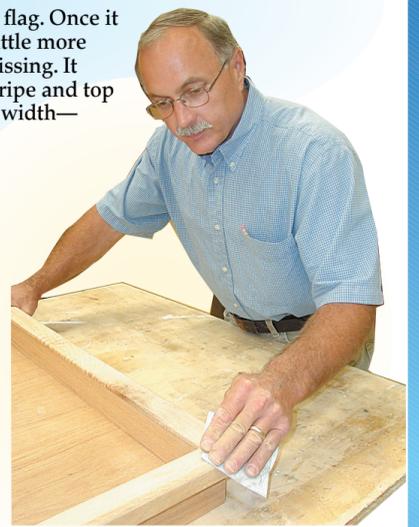
Collections historian Laurie C. Dickens prepares the Seage flag for its return to Fredericksburg, Virginia. She is applying a protective sheer fabric cover, which will be removed once the flag arrives in Virginia.



Courtesy of Rick Wyatt, Crew Flags.

This flag (left) is called the "Stars and Bars." It was the first official flag of the Confederacy, in use from March 1861 to May 1863. This particular design, with only seven stars—representing the original seven seceding states—makes it the earliest version of the Stars and Bars. The flag is four feet high.

The Seage flag is also a "Stars and Bars" flag. Once it was six feet wide. Its current width is a little more than two feet—so almost four feet are missing. It had a bottom red stripe, middle white stripe and top red stripe. Each stripe is about the same width—about 16 inches.



Michigan Historical Museum exhibit builder Rod Konieczny sands the case in which the Confederate flag from Fredericksburg, Virginia, will travel home.

Returning a Confederate Civilian Flag—2003

So, what will become of this Seage flag? Curators, state historians, reenactors of the Fourth Michigan infantry, Milton Devinney and other Seage descendants unanimously decided to send the flag to the town that once flew it. They agreed that artifacts such as the flag have the most value in the places where they were once used.

On August 31, 2003, Michigan will return the Seage flag to Fredericksburg, Virginia, in a special ceremony. Returning this flag represents the power of the artifact to heal and give memory its rightful place in history.

Civil War Flag Time Line

- 1869:** Governor Crapo accepts the Civil War battle flags on behalf of Michigan's people.
- 1879:** Michigan places the flags in its new Capitol building in Lansing
- 1951:** Milton Devinney donates the Seage flag to the State Archives of Michigan.
- 1990:** The Civil War flags are removed from the Capitol during its renovation.
- 1992:** Flag reproductions are installed in the Capitol rotunda.
- 1995:** Civil War flags move to the Michigan Historical Center for environmentally safe storage.
- 2003:** Michigan returns the Seage Confederate flag to Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Things To Do

- ★ At www.michiganhistory.org, to visit Rally Round the Flags, an exhibit of Michigan's battle flags, go to Michigan Historical Museum: Special Exhibits. To visit *The Civil War, 1861-1865*, go to Michigan Historical Museum: *First People to 1900*. Then go to *Kids' Stuff* and *Teachers' Stuff*.
- ★ Comments or suggestions? Write to timetraveler@michigan.gov

At the Michigan Historical Museum

Visit the Civil War Gallery.

The Michigan Historical Museum is located two blocks west of the Capitol in downtown Lansing. Museum admission is free. Hours: Monday-Friday: 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Saturday: 10 a.m.-4:00 p.m.; Sunday: 1-5 p.m. Telephone hotline: (517) 373-3559. Visit the Michigan Historical Museum's Web site: <http://www.michiganhistory.org>



Students participate in a Civil War reenactment program with the 7th Michigan Volunteer Infantry, Company B, at a *Summer Sizzles* program at the Michigan Historical Museum.