

History of the Flag Collection – The Civil War Years

Governor Edwin D. Morgan through Adjutant General Thomas Hillhouse issued Special Orders No. 866 dated 20 December 1862 to create the Bureau of Military Statistics and appointed Lockwood Doty as the Bureau's Chief.¹ The New York State Legislature passed and newly elected Governor Horatio Seymour signed a bill on 8 April 1863 requiring Doty to "collect and preserve an authentic sketch of every person from the state who has volunteered into service which will include an account of their organization together with an account of the aid afforded by the town and counties."²

In a circular dated 21 January 1863, Adjutant General John Sprague expressed "that all regimental colors, worn out in service, and of consolidated regiments, be forwarded to General Headquarters so that they may be deposited in an appropriate manner as a record of the war and fortitude of her sons."³ On 24 April 1863 before a joint session of the Legislature with Governor Seymour in attendance, Adjutant General Sprague presented seven flags to the assembled body - one flag each from the 30th, 40th, 60th, 61st, 71st, 101st, and 102nd Regiments, NY Volunteer Infantry. These seven flags formed the core of the battle flag collection as we know it today. The "1863 Presentation" included the National color of 40th Regiment, NY Volunteer Infantry, carried by Color Sergeant Joseph Conroy at Fair Oaks before he suffered a mortal wound. Color Corporal Charles Boyle then took up the flag, suffered a wound, received an order to report to the rear but refused to relinquish his duties only to be shot dead. In the battles following Fair Oaks, three additional color bearers received wounds and two others were killed in action.

During the year 1863 and early months of 1864, many regiments forwarded their battle flags with the Adjutant General in accordance with above-mentioned circular. Governor Horatio Seymour selected fifty flags from among those deposited during this time frame and formally presented them before a joint session of the Legislature on 20 April 1864. The "1864 Presentation" included a Regimental color carried by the 104th Regiment, NY Volunteer Infantry. The 104th Regiment carried this Tiffany & Company marked color through many battles including South Mountain and Antietam where each regimental color bearer suffered severe wounds.

The final and most grand flag presentation ceremony occurred on 4 July 1865 in conjunction with Albany's Independence Day public celebration. A venerable who's who from the Civil War attended including General U.S. Grant and his staff, as well as Generals Kilpatrick, Butterfield, and Sickles. Major General Daniel Butterfield provided the presentation address in which he stated, "These standards are returned, battle-scarred, hallowed by the blood of your patriot sons - a precious treasure, a priceless legacy, for they shall tell your children's children of manhood and patriotism rising in their might to sustain the right. These are glorious insignia of the highest devotion and sacrifice of man for man, of man for country. I may ask you, . . . that you cherish them . . . as proud mementoes of the triumph of right."⁴ One flag from the "1865 Presentation"

exemplified Butterfield's sentiments, the National Color carried by the 105th Regiment, NY Volunteer Infantry. Recruited in Madison and Genesee Counties, the 105th Regiment had seven color bearers killed or wounded carrying their National Color. Pierced with dozens of bullet holes and its staff cut in two, the flag rallied the 105th with its embroidered inscription "Justice Shall Triumph".

Many regiments could not arrive in Albany by July 1865 due to continued military operations, logistical problems, or the like. Consequently, representatives from such regiments deposited their flags after the public ceremony throughout the remainder of 1865 and 1866. In the Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of Military Statistics submitted to the Legislature February 11, 1867, Colonel A.J.H. Duganne (Doty's successor as Chief of Bureau) identified 811 flags within the collection.⁵

¹ Special Order No. 866 dated December 20, 1862. Series 14405 Special Orders, 1855-1975. New York State Archives.

² New York State Legislature, *Laws of the State of New York*, 86th sess., chapter 113 (April 8, 1863) (Albany: Weed, Parsons, 1863) pp. 171-72.

³ New York State Legislature, *Presentation of Regimental Colors to the Legislature*, (1863) pp 5-6.

⁴ Presentation of Flags of New York Volunteer Regiments and Other Organizations, to His Excellency, Governor Fenton, in Accordance With a Resolution of the Legislature, July 4, 1865 (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1865) p 20.

⁵ Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of Military Statistics (Albany: C. Van Benthuysen & Sons, 1867), pp 28-29, 671-672.