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Subject: Mark Whitlock  
Date: Sun, 3 Feb 2002 17:44:57 EST  
From: Chukrock2@cs.com  
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Subject: PML Search Result matching Whitlock  
Date: Sun, 3 Feb 2002 14:17:38 -0700  
From: "Dorothy Falk" <dorothyf@intertek.net>  
To: chukrock2@cs.com

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A result of your requested PML search. To refine or cancel this  
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Source: IL-CIVIL-WAR-L@rootsweb.com  
Subject: [IL-CIVIL-WAR] Historical Flags

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-0202030408feb03.story?coll=chi%2Dnews%2Dhed>  
>From the Chicago Tribune

Civil War flags on verge of perishing  
Funds are scarce for fixing banners  
By Adam Kovac  
Tribune staff reporter

February 3, 2002

SPRINGFIELD -- As flag-waving fervor swept the country, one of the nation's largest collections of Civil War battle flags lay rotting in a hallway of an old state office building.

This spring, the flags, which represent regiments from Illinois' substantial participation in the Union war effort, will be put into archival containers to slow their decay.

But experts fear that the effort to save the historical items is underfunded and that many of the banners will deteriorate beyond the point of repair before the entire collection can be saved.

"A lot of these flags were returned with the blood of the people of Illinois who served them," said state Rep. Rick Winkel (R-Champaign). "Once they're gone, they're gone forever."

In 2000 Winkel sponsored legislation that formed the Illinois Military Flags Commission, which is charged with finding a way to save the flags.

Curators estimate it could take between \$5,000 and \$25,000 and several months to save each of the flags.

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Unlike some other states, Illinois required all units to return from the Civil War to turn in their flags. Illinois has a collection of 896 flags, mostly from the Civil War. A smaller number come from the Mexican War through the World Wars.

Only a few people in the country are trained to do the difficult, meticulous hand-stitching required to preserve the flags.

Curators believe they can preserve five flags a year. At that rate, it would take roughly 80 years to save all of the 400 Civil War flags in need of immediate preservation, even if the Illinois State Military Museum had the \$1 million-plus needed to do so.

Museum curator Mark Whitlock estimates that some parts of the collection will be beyond preservation within 50 years.

The state has set aside \$250,000 for the project over the last two years, and that money was used to buy the archival cabinets that will be used this spring.

Private contributors have donated \$6,600 to be spent on specific flags.

In addition to years of exposure to changing temperature and ultraviolet light, the flags have become too weak to support their own weight as they hang from their staffs.

Locked in dust-filled glass display cases and laid bare to the sunlight, the flags are in a rarely traveled hallway of the Michael J. Howlett Office Building just behind the state Capitol. Each flag tells a piece of the story of the 250,000 Illinois residents who fought in the Civil War.

The flag of the 13th Illinois regiment was captured in battle but later recovered. Military historians believe it was the first Union flag flown over Richmond, Va., when the Confederate capital surrendered and ended the war.

The regimental colors of the 90th Illinois are sewn with green silk and emblazoned with a harp, signifying its all-Irish contingent, many of whom hailed from Cook County.

Also in the collection are the faded and tattered colors of Illinois' only all-black regiment, the 29th United States Colored Troops.

The process of preserving the flags involves painstaking work with microscopes and tweezers, said Fonda Thomsen, whose Maryland-based Textile Preservation Associates Inc. refurbished flags from the Texas and Iowa collections.

Most of the Illinois flags are made of silk, making restitching more difficult. The flags are also covered with a black netting fitted to them in the 1920s to help preserve them.

At the same time, the flags undergo a forensic analysis to verify their authenticity, making each not only a story but a puzzle.

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"If they say, 'This flag was involved in so many engagements,' then it should contain combustion products," said Thomsen, "And if it was a naval flag, then it should contain salt

spray."

Every feature of the flag--how it aged, where it traveled, what kind of thread it was sewn with--is documented not only for use during preservation, but also as a benchmark for historians. It will take up to 100 hours to preserve just one flag, she said.

Once treated and encapsulated in air-tight display cabinets, the flags can return to the state for a rotating display in the Hall of Flags or be put in storage at the Illinois National Guard post in Springfield.

With economic problems causing lawmakers to tighten their belts, curators might have to rely more on private contributors who want to sponsor specific flags.

One such group is the Macoupin County Civil War Roundtable, which late last year donated money to preserve the colors of their local 122nd Illinois regiment.

Group member John Alexander said he was stunned when he saw the deterioration of the collection during a recent visit to Springfield with other Civil War buffs.

"On the one hand, I was pleased to see that these flags still exist and, on the other hand, I'm shocked that they could turn to dust," he said. "It's pretty hard to let that part of our history go."

He thinks other private contributors would be willing to get involved if they knew about the problem.

"I think there still is a big well of patriotism out there and now would be the time to ask people for money," Alexander said.

But despite the group's enthusiasm, it has raised only \$100 so far and expects to come up with about \$1,000 more.

Fundraising is a problem other states face too. Iowa, for example, drew upon state funds in several stages to preserve its collection. Texas, which had a smaller 32-flag collection, was able to use funds from private sponsors.

For its part, Illinois probably won't be able to completely underwrite the project, said state Sen. Walter Dudyycz (R-Chicago), who is a member of the 15-member flag commission.

"We do have to consider the deterioration of the property and how to preserve it for years to come," Dudyycz said. But "we have to set our budget priorities because we're not in the same situation as we were a year ago."

Still, Winkel said the state has a duty to research a realistic and long-term preservation plan before the commission disbands in 2003.

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"The economy will not stay down forever," he said. "As we get stronger and are able to honor our commitments, this should be one of those commitments that we honor."