



Iowa Battle Flag Collection

ISSUE

This *Issue Review* provides an overview of the [Iowa Battle Flag Collection](#) and reviews the total project funding, progress, and future needs.

AFFECTED AGENCIES

Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), Historical Division (also known as the State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI))

CODE AUTHORITY

Iowa Code section [303.2\(2\)\(k\)](#)

BACKGROUND

The General Assembly enacted [1892 Iowa Acts](#), Chapter 78, (Preservation of Standards and Battle Flags Act) to direct the Adjutant General and the Curator of Historical Collections to display the standards and battle flags carried by Iowa regiments and batteries during the Civil War to be placed in sealed glass cases for display and preservation. The execution of this Act resulted in "[Battle Flag Day](#)" on August 10, 1894, where 135 Battle Flags were placed in hermetically sealed glass cases. These cases were installed on the second floor of the Capitol just outside of the Legislative Chambers. After the fire of 1904, they were moved to the first floor rotunda area. Eventually, six glass display cases on the first floor of the Iowa State Capitol once held battle flags from the Civil War, Spanish American War, and World War I.

Over the years, the manner in which the battle flags were displayed in the Capitol increased the deterioration of the flags. In 1999, the General Assembly allocated \$50,000 from the Capitol Interior Restoration appropriation and required the DCA to conduct a study concerning the stabilization of the condition of the battle flags.¹ The studies' findings were presented in the report, "Iowa Battle Flag Collection: Recommendations for Stabilization and Use," in June 2000.

The Report concluded that because responsibility for care of the Capitol flag collection was never assigned, the flags were left neglected and deteriorating. The Report's recommendations for future actions included:

- Assign responsibility for the management and care of the flag collection.
- Provide the assignee with funding and staff to adequately carry out the mandate.
- Secure adequate museum quality space to perform the necessary conservation procedures for the initial stabilization of the flag collection.

¹ [1999 Iowa Acts](#), Chapter 204, §4 (HF 772—FY 2000 Infrastructure and Capital Appropriations Act)

- Secure adequate museum quality space for the long-term preservation and utilization of the collection for the benefit of the public and scholars through exhibits, publications, and research.
- Establish a four-year flag conservation program for the removal of the flags from the cases and preparing them for long-term preservation.

After the report was issued, the General Assembly inserted Iowa Code section [303.2\(2\)\(k\)](#)², that states:

[The Historical Division shall...] Administer, preserve, and interpret the battle flag collection assembled by the state in consultation and coordination with the department of veterans affairs and the department of administrative services. A portion of the battle flag collection shall be on display at the state capitol and the state historical building at all times, unless on loan approved by the department of cultural affairs.

CURRENT SITUATION

Status of Flags

Before the flags were transferred to the Historical Division of the DCA, there was no baseline of information on the design, make-up, condition, or historical context of each flag. Additionally, there was no photographic documentation, tracking information, or an accurate maintained inventory. These factors lead to their deteriorating state.

After responsibility was assigned to the Historical Division, all the flags and accessory objects were assigned a permanent number and object tag, had an incoming survey performed, were stored to professional standards, photographed, and were entered into the collections database. The Division performs an annual inventory of flag condition, including photographic documentation to monitor the condition of each flag.

Table 1 outlines the current flags in the collection from each war, and the status of preservation required.

Stabilization is defined as the effort made to maintain the flags in their present condition and minimize the rate of change. This does not address any damage already incurred. It also establishes basic identification within the collections system. These flags are not in suitable condition for exhibition, loan, or travel.

Conservation involves all actions that will prepare a flag for exhibition and creates an understanding with respect of the aesthetic and historic significance, as well as its physical integrity. It is the goal of conservation to preserve the original object and uphold the maker's original intent. This is achieved by:

- diagnostic examination,
- treatment to repair damage incurred during its life and to improve its appearance,
- preventative maintenance (active environmental monitoring, adherence to professional standards (light, rotation, crating, pest, inventory) and developing interpretive approaches)

² [2001 Iowa Acts](#), Chapter 86 (HF 352—Iowa Battle Flag Collection Act)

- documentation (analysis of material, historical research, and creating display methods).

Table 1
Battle Flag Stabilization Project Flag Status

Flag Origins	Number in Collection	Number Completed (Stabilized)	Number Needing Conservation
Pre-Civil War	5	3	2
Civil War	197	103	94
Civil War flags added in May 2011	13		
Civil War flags added in 2012	4		
Civil War Period	3	2	1
Grand Army of the Republic	4	4	0
Deaccessioned in 2012 (Not part of project)	8		
Original State Flag of Iowa	1	0	1
Original Submission for the State Flag of Iowa	1	1	
Flag Day Banners	6	6	0
Civil War Burial Flag	1	1	0
Mexican Conflict	3	3	0
Spanish American War	45	16	27
Spanish American War added in 2012	1	1	0
Red Cross/Sanitary	3	3	0
World War I	31	7	24
African American Service 1914-1916 (over scale)	1		1
USS Iowa	5	4	1
USS Des Moines	1	1	1
Accessory Objects (staff, finial, cords, mourning ribbons, signs and letters)	608	Completed with associated flag	

Source: Department of Cultural Affairs

NOTE: Stabilized flags may require conservation treatment to be interpreted, displayed and preserved.

The DCA had Textile Preservation Associates, Inc. (TPA) review the 28th Iowa Infantry and the 4th Iowa Infantry flags for potential flag conservation treatments in 2008. The TPA estimated conservation costs at \$36,000 and \$47,000, respectively, plus the cost of shipping,³ with an estimated two years to complete. Based on this information, the DCA estimated that most of the other flags in the collection will also cost \$35,000 for conservation with a two-year completion time for each.

In response to these estimates, work is completed in-house by the Battle Flag Curator and the Battle Flag Restoration Volunteers. The DCA estimates that on average, it takes 240 hours and \$4,800 to conserve a flag. Currently, the project has been completing an average of eight flags per year.

During 2012, eight Grand Army of the Republic flags were deaccessioned by the DCA. Deaccession is the act of removing a flag from the Historical Division permanently. These flags were deaccessioned due to their poor quality as a result of being stored in the basement of the Old Historical Building (Ola Babcock Miller Building) basement. During storage, the flags were exposed to excessive amounts of mold and sewage, as well as very large tears and missing portions. The determination was made that there was no potential to preserve these flags. The flags were properly and respectfully disposed of by the 49th Iowa Volunteer Regiment of the

³ Shipping costs depend upon the size of the flag, shipping method, insurance, and packaging. At that time, shipping was estimated to cost between \$8,000 and \$10,000.

Sons of Union Veterans. The procedures for deaccession are defined in Iowa Administrative Code.⁴

Additionally, 13 flags have been added to the collection since the project began in 2000. In 2011, a family discovered one flag that had been stuffed inside a lard can and stored in the family garage. Due to the lack of light and heat, the flag was well preserved and donated to the State Historical Society of Iowa.

Loaning Flags

The DCA loans flags to other entities for display. Flags loaned to outside entities are insured with a bond against damage and loss. Currently, one flag is on loan to The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina, and is insured for \$500,000 with a loan return date of January 2014. Two captured Confederate flags have been loaned to the Confederate Memorial Park with a loan return date of June 6, 2014, and renewal options through 2015.

Publications and Public Outreach

The DCA has tracked publications and other outside promotions related to the Battle Flags. The list of publications and promotions is extensive and includes flag rotations, major exhibits, a traveling kiosk exhibit, volunteer publications, professional presentations, peer reviewed publications, books, films, an Iowa Public Television documentary, newspaper articles, and radio segments.

For public interaction, video conferencing equipment was installed between the laboratory and the museum for the public to observe conservators working on the flags and ask questions. The video conference equipment operates on Tuesday and Thursday morning.

Flags Displayed in the Capitol

For proper display of the Battle Flags in the Capitol, the original display cases need to be restored to maintain the proper climate-controlled environment. Of the six flag display cases in the first floor rotunda of the Capitol, only one has been restored for displaying Battle Flags as part of the Capitol Restoration Process. The last bid that was sent out by the Department of Administrative Services for restoring the five remaining cases and updating the lighting in the completed case averaged \$230,000 in 2010. This was a component of a larger bid and was not completed due to lack of funding. Completing the display cases as a stand-alone project would likely cost more due to inflation, increased administration costs, and overhead expenses.

Funding

The General Assembly has appropriated a total of \$1.9 million for the Battle Flag Stabilization Project since FY 2000. Funding sources include the General Fund (GF) and Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund (RIIF). **Table 2** presents total funding from all allocations and appropriations to the project.

⁴ Chapter [223—13.6](#)

Table 2
Battle Flag Stabilization Project Funding

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Bill Number</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Amount</u>
2000	HF 772	RIIF	\$ 50,000
2001	SF 2453	RIIF	150,000
2002	HF 742	RIIF	150,000
2003	HF 2614/HF 2627	RIIF	100,000
2004	SF 452	RIIF	150,000
2005	SF 2298	RIIF	100,000
2006	HF 875	RIIF	220,000
2007	HF 2782	RIIF	220,000
2008	HF 911	RIIF	220,000
2009	SF 2432	RIIF	220,000
2011	SF 2389	RIIF	60,000
2012	SF 517	GF	60,000
2013	HF 2337	GF	60,000
2014	SF 430	GF	94,000
TOTAL			<u>\$1,854,000</u>

Source: LSA Fiscal Reports 1999-2012

The increase in funding during FY 2006 to FY 2008 was to support two additional staff members on the project, a Conservator Assistant and Research Historian, bringing the total staff on the project to three. The Conservator Assistant was initially funded through a federal grant. Staffing levels were reduced in FY 2011 due to a hiring freeze.

In addition to these appropriations, the DCA received an appropriation of \$350,000 in FY 2010 from the RIIF for the Civil War Sesquicentennial. Of these funds, \$15,109 was expended for the creation of the Battle Flag Laboratory Interpretive Exhibit that created a public viewing area, included education and programming costs, and funded installation of a display case on the second floor of the State Historical Museum.

The total expenditures for the project, excluding balance carryforward, are presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3
Battle Flag Stabilization Project
Annual Expenditures

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>
2002	\$ 49,000
2003	69,000
2004	190,000
2005	173,000
2006	233,000
2007	178,000
2008	175,000
2009	226,000
2010	88,000
2011	99,000
2012	95,000
2013*	95,000
TOTAL	<u>\$1,670,000</u>

*FY 2013 has not officially closed yet.
Source: State Accounting System

The annual expenditures for the period of FY 2002 to FY 2013, excluding balance carryforward, averaged \$139,000. However, expenditures in the last three years have been reduced, averaging \$96,000. Expenditures include staff costs as well as lab equipment, supplies, and framing.

In addition to conservation work, staff time on the project is also dedicated to housekeeping, museum exhibits, museum textiles, museum planning, museum tours, assisting other flag programs, research requests, and Iowa Preservation Center work.

Federal Funding

In addition to the funding in Table 2, the DCA received two one-time federal grants totaling \$80,000 in FY 2006. The first was from the [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#) for preservation of the flags; the second was from the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) for rehousing flags from the Spanish-American War. Both of these grants concluded in 2006.

Other Funds Received

Under the authority of Iowa Code section [303.9](#), the DCA accepts private donations for the purpose of individual projects and deposits them in a Trust Account. As of January 2013, the Trust Account for the Battle Flags Project has collected approximately \$48,000. The last transfer from the Trust Account was \$35,000 in FY 2006 in anticipation of a costly preservation of flags at an outside professional preservation company that was paid for in FY 2009.

The 2012 General Assembly created The Battle Flag Restoration Fund under the control of the DCA.⁵ Money in the Fund is appropriated to the DCA for the continuation of the project. The Fund contains money appropriated by the General Assembly, donations, and proceeds from insurance settlements relating to incidences involving Battle Flags that have been loaned to other states or entities. As of January 2013, no money has been collected for this Fund.

Volunteer Time and In-Kind Contributions

The DCA relies heavily on volunteers for the project. Work done includes lab time, design, research and outreach, program development, label research and writing, sewing, frame building, and photography.

To complete the project, the DCA has obtained fixtures suiting the unique needs of the Battle Flags. In-kind contributions have included the design and creation of a special bench that fits over conservation tables allowing conservators to work on sections in the middle of oversized flags, other lab supplies, environmental monitoring systems, and office supplies.

These in-kind partnerships have come from Central Iowa Wire and Steele, 132nd Fighter Wing, Sons of Union Veterans, Sons of Confederate Veterans, Upper Iowa University History Department, Central College History and Honors Program, the Iowa National Guard, Sons of the American Revolution, and the Griswold Community Schools.

OTHER STATES

Other states have taken steps to preserve and exhibit battle flag collections from the Civil War and other wars.

The [Wisconsin Veterans Museum](#) undertook responsibility for the conservation of Wisconsin's Civil War battle flags in the 1990s. The Wisconsin State Legislature does not budget a direct

⁵ See 2012 Iowa Acts, Chapter 1136 (HF 2337 FY 2013 Economic Development Appropriations Act)

funding amount for Civil War Battle Flag Preservation. Instead, the Legislature budgets for the museum operations and the museum determines the amount to be used for flag preservation.

The Minnesota Historical Society assumed responsibility for the conservation, preservation, and exhibition of [historic](#) flags in 2007. Funding for preservation came through a federal grant from Save America's Treasures, a one-time match from the Minnesota legislature of \$150,000, and a private foundation provided \$148,000.

Pennsylvania initiated a "[Save the Flags](#)" project in 1982 that is overseen by the Capitol Preservation Committee. The project was started with a specific appropriation from the legislature, but was later discontinued due to budget cuts. Care for the flags is being maintained through the Committee's operational appropriation and private donations.

Other states including Ohio, Texas, and New York also have projects underway for the preservation and conservation of battle flags that are funded through various combinations of state, private, and grant funds.

BUDGET IMPACT

As mentioned previously, annual spending over the past three fiscal years has averaged \$94,000. This spending has relied heavily on utilizing the balance carryforward from previous fiscal years. The appropriations to the project for FY 2011 through FY 2013 period have been less than the amount spent, depleting the amount of carryforward. The new appropriation of \$94,000 in FY 2014 will need to be maintained for work to continue at the same pace.

The "Iowa Battle Flag Collection: Recommendations for Stabilization and Use" Report recommended an annual cost for maintenance and utilization of the Capitol collection of \$100,000.

If the General Assembly wishes to restore additional flag display cases in the Capitol, additional funds will need to be identified and appropriated. The Department of Administration estimates that due to the design of the display cases that hinge at the top, rather than the sides, and the importance of stabilizing the 100-year-old glass while open, costs for opening a display case could range from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

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