

Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the Legislative Session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

Examining the Eights: Capitol Interior Restoration and Battle Flag Preservation



**Governor
Thomas Vilsack**

The first year of the 78th General Assembly convened for 109 days from January 11 through April 29, 1999. The second year convened for 108 days from January 10 through April 26, 2000.

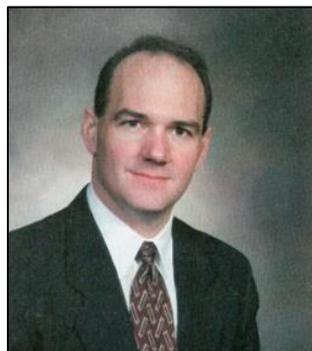
[Mary Kramer](#) presided over the Senate and [Ron Corbett](#) was Speaker of the House in 1999 and [Brent Siegrist](#) was Speaker in 2000.

[Tom Vilsack](#) was Governor, serving from 1999 to 2007.

Iowa's population had grown to 2,926,324, according to the 2000 census.



**Senator
Mary Kramer**



**Representative
Ron Corbett**



**Representative
Brent Siegrist**

The majority of interior and exterior restoration of the Iowa State Capitol took place from 1983 to 2011. The 78th General Assembly approved a portion of the restoration appropriations in [HF 772](#).

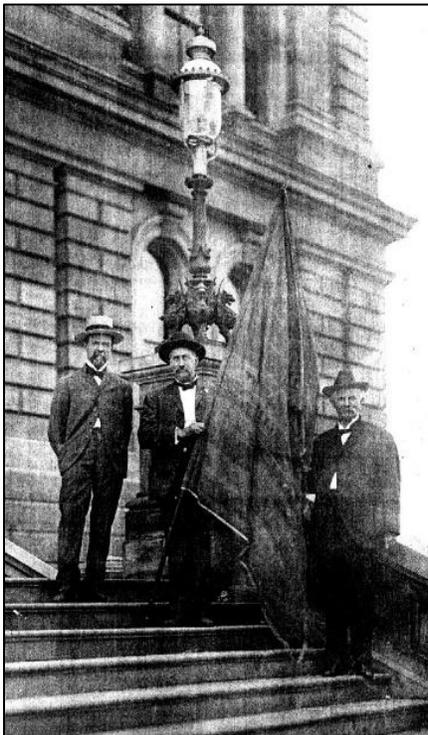
Iowa Legislation

A part of a 1999 appropriation was allocated for a study relating to the preservation of Iowa's collection of Civil War battle flags.

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8 15 11. For capitol interior restoration:
8 16 FY 1999-2000..... $ 4,381,000
8 17 FY 2000-2001..... $ 4,324,100
8 18 The department shall cooperate with the legislative and
8 19 judicial branches regarding decisions involving the
8 20 renovation, remodeling, preparation, or assignment of space
8 21 occupied or used by the respective branches within the state
8 22 capitol building pursuant to section 2.43.
8 23 Of the amount appropriated in this subsection for the
8 24 fiscal year beginning July 1, 1999, $50,000 shall be allocated
8 25 to the department of cultural affairs to be used to conduct a
8 26 study to stabilize the battle flag collection's condition by a
8 27 professional flag conservator and for other necessary expenses
8 28 incurred by the department, notwithstanding section 8.57,
8 29 subsection 5, paragraph "c".
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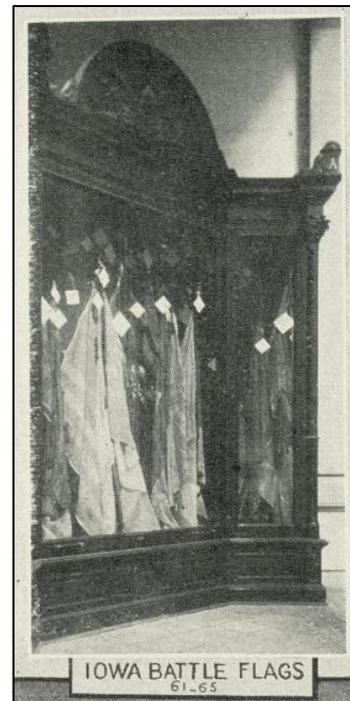
The portion of HF 772 pertaining to the battle flag study.

The battle flags had been housed in the Capitol for over 100 years. The Civil War flags, often referred to as "colors," were carried into battle, leading the



more than 76,000 Iowa men who volunteered to fight the Civil War.

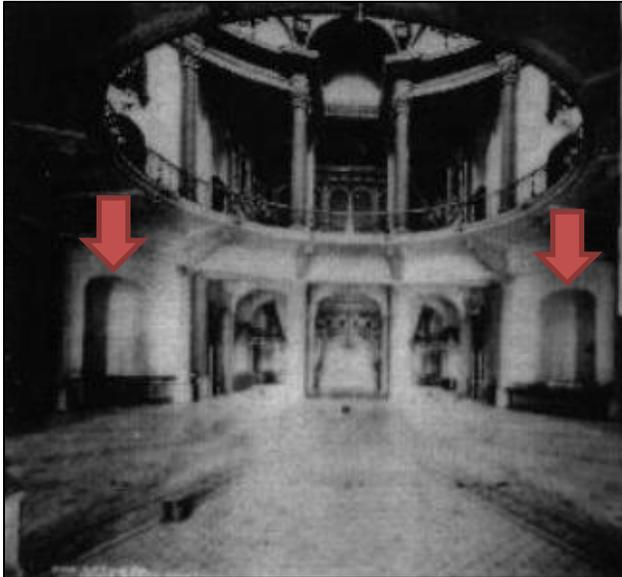
After the war was over, the regimental and national colors returned to Iowa. These flags were housed in the Arsenal until August 10, 1894, when the Governor proclaimed Battle Flag Day. The celebration centered on the Civil War veterans parading through Des Moines carrying the tattered, torn, and bloodstained flags to the



Capitol. Once inside the Capitol, they were placed in specially designed cases.

The wood and glass cases were located on the second floor near the library entrance. The flags remained in those cases until 1904. Following the Capitol

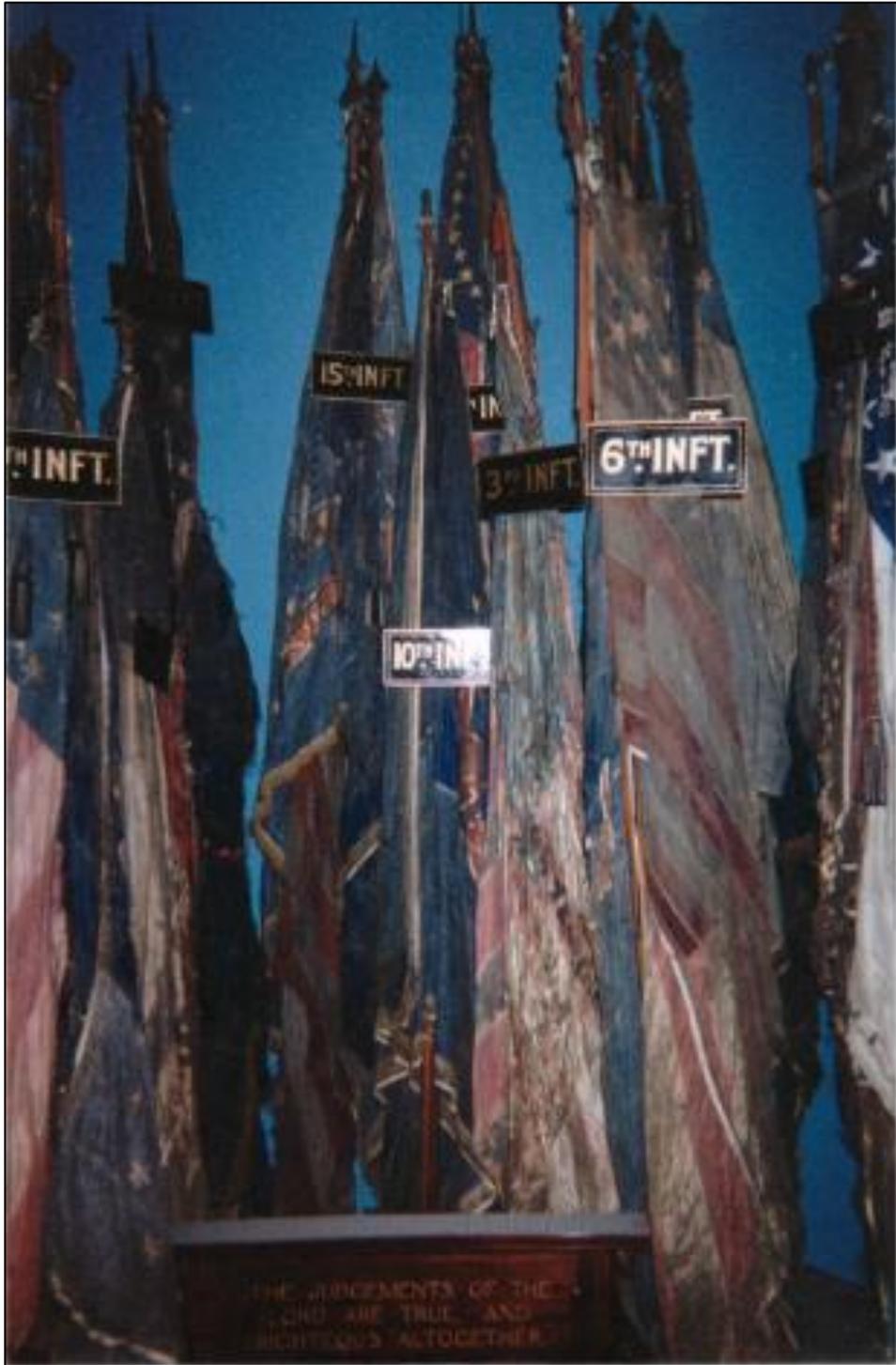
fire in January of 1904, the flags were moved to the first floor and placed in the four niches around the rotunda fronted by glass.



Left: This is a photograph of the first floor looking east before 1904. The flag cases are empty.

Below: This is a view looking south showing the battle flags in the cases.





A closer look at the battle flags shows the gallant wear.

The flags remained in the cases on the first floor until the 78th General Assembly directed the Department of Cultural Affairs to conduct a [study](#) of the Battle Flag collection.

The results of the study were submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly in June 2000. The first recommendation was to remove the flags from the cases; take the flags off the staffs; and remove a gauze encasement from the colors. This wrap had been sewn on by women of Iowa and Governor John Gear's wife in an attempt to preserve the flags.

Then the flags were to be cleaned in such a way as to preserve the historical dignity of each.

Finally, the flags were to be stored in a flat position in seven-foot square trays located in suitable climate-controlled storage areas within the Iowa Historical Society Museum. This would remove the stress from the hand-painted silk fibers, allowing the flags to rest for decades without further deterioration.



A look at one of the battle flag cases from the second floor looking toward the northeast.

The study also recommended the Spanish American War flags and World War I flags housed in the Capitol be included in the preservation project. A summary of the study was to "stabilize," or incorporate everything according to current preservation standards without subjecting the flags to something that could not be reversed.

About \$2 million in state funding was appropriated for this project. The Capitol flag collection has been stabilized and is currently stored in the basement of the museum. A few flags are in pressure mounts. The flags in pressure mounts have been used in a variety of displays at the museum.

A pressure mount is a frame designed to display the flags like a picture, but the flags and flag fibers are held in place tightly protecting the flag from sliding



This is an empty flag case on the first floor of the Capitol.

down in the frame. One of the flag cases in the Capitol has been retrofitted making it a suitable environment for a Civil War flag to be displayed. Because a pressure mount is required, only one flag at a time can be displayed in that case. The other three cases have not been updated.

The [Code of Iowa](#) requires a portion of the Battle Flag collection remain on display in the Capitol as well as at the museum. An assortment of flags from the entire collection has been rotated in and out the case at the Capitol.

IOWA CODE

k. 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.

Address by Governor Frank Jackson – August 10, 1894

"In again assuming the care and protection of these precious emblems of liberty, let me assure you, veteran heroes, that the state of Iowa fully realizes



and appreciates their priceless value. Here in Iowa's beautiful capitol they shall remain forever, forming a sacred altar around which will gather in loving remembrance the grateful hearts of more than two millions of people. As long as their faded folds shall hang together they shall teach the generations that are to follow, the loyalty and bravery of Iowa's soldiers. And when the hand of time shall have brushed away the last faded shred of these precious and priceless emblems, their memory shall remain forever an inspiration to deeds of honor, of heroism, and of glory."

Further Information

[Battle Flag Day](#) book

Issue Review ["Iowa Battle Flag Collection"](#) – Published: September 5, 2013