

# ***1861: Banners for Glory***

## ***A Civil War Student Tour at the New York State Capitol***

### **Introduction and Program Objectives**

In this special tour program which features the battle flag exhibition, “1861: Banners for Glory,” students will connect the exhibition’s specific themes, storylines and symbols with Civil War imagery carved in stone, cast in bronze and painted on canvas at the New York State Capitol. Students will closely examine the eight conserved Civil War flags included in the exhibition and learn how their design and iconography expressed the attitudes of the soldiers and citizens of the time. They will get a brief overview of the flag conservation process. New York State’s role in the Civil War will also be discussed.

The tour complements New York State Social Studies Core Curriculum allowing the students to:

- Identify the roles and contributions of individuals and/or groups
- Draw conclusions and understand the interconnections of people and events from a variety of perspectives
- Recognize the significance of historical evidence from viewing authentic Civil War artifacts.

### **Historical Background**

From 1861-1865, New York State played a pivotal role in the Civil War. New York contributed more soldiers, money and materials to the Union cause than any other state. Records show that over 448,000 New Yorkers served and over 53,000 men died. The home front they left behind experienced untold hardship and grief, as well.

As the state’s military forces organized for war, they rallied around their cherished regimental flags. The flags served as a practical tool for the soldiers to identify themselves and to mark their location on the march, in camp or on the battlefield. In addition, regimental flags reaffirmed group identity and enhanced morale. Beyond their practical military use, flags also symbolized a regiment’s local community, and expressed public and individual sentiments, ethnic identities and patriotism.

Primarily, however, battle flags served as an important tool for communication. On the chaotic and confusing field of battle, soldiers “rallied” around their regimental flags in order to hold their position. From a distance, officers could see each regiment’s location by looking for their flags. The utility and symbolism of regimental flags made them a prime target for the enemy. Flag bearers were more likely to be casualties than other soldiers. Many died carrying a flag in battle or, as members of the color guard, in defense of the flag and its bearer. A large proportion of Civil War Medal of Honor recipients were Flag Bearers.

These banners were usually presented to each regiment with great ceremony. Often they were hand-made or commissioned by the women of the regimental families. Prominent local politicians also donated them. No matter their origin, the flags always represented the honor of the regiment. Losing a flag to the enemy was considered a disgrace. Today, they serve as a

window to our past, and continue to teach us about the trials and sacrifices faced by New Yorkers during the Civil War.

## **The New York State Battle Flag Collection and Conservation**

Even before the Civil War ended, New York State started to collect the flags borne by her native regiments to honor the service and sacrifices of its men and to commemorate the support provided by local communities. Beginning in 1863, regiments were instructed to turn in their flags to the state's top military officer at the Capitol when they returned home, or if a worn battle flag needed replacement. Because of this foresight and precedent, the New York State Battle Flag Collection is the largest publicly-held collection of Civil War battle flags in the nation. Approximately 900 Civil War flags are part of the collection that numbers over 2,000 in its entirety. The collection spans the history of New York State from the War of 1812 to the present day conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Originally housed in the first Capitol building in Albany, the Battle Flag Collection temporarily relocated to a local storage building soon after construction began on the current Capitol in 1867. The architects, designers, and skilled artisans who built the Capitol sought to preserve the memory of the decisive and tragic events of the Civil War. Consequently, the likenesses of prominent wartime figures and many patriotic symbols were incorporated into the building's decoration. In 1881 the Battle Flag Collection moved into the Capitol as a fitting home amongst other Civil War commemoratives preserved in the seat of government.

### **Conservation of the Flags**

For decades, the collection's Civil War flags have been furled tightly around their staffs and since 1887, crammed into glass-front, wooden cases in the Capitol. Consequently, these flags in the "Flag Room" on the first floor have been damaged by gravity, lack of temperature control and excessive light exposure.

Recognizing the collection's conservation needs, in 2000 the governor and the state legislature began funding the New York State Battle Flag Preservation Project to conserve, properly store, and study the Battle Flag Collection. Between 2000-2009, textile conservators from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation inventoried all of the flags to determine their condition, type and dimensions. Over 25% of the collection has been conserved, (including nearly half of the Civil War flags) and stored in a secure, clean environment. In addition, the Battle Flag Preservation Project has installed an annual exhibition at the Capitol featuring conserved flags from the collection. The latest exhibition, "1861: Banners for Glory," opened in July 2011 and chronicles the start of the Civil War.

### **Student Materials and Resources**

1. Reading: *Banners For Glory* Summary
2. Activity: *Civil War Heroes on the Million Dollar Staircase*
3. Activity: *It's All About the Flags*



**The Departure of the 7<sup>th</sup> Rgt. To the War, April 19, 1861, 1869. Thomas Nast (1840-1902).**

Illustrator and artist Thomas Nast immortalized the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment's triumphant departure from New York City in his largest painting. The artist depicted a patriotic, flag-filled scene as the regiment passed in review on Broadway. New York State Military Museum

**Student Reading: *Banners for Glory***

During the Civil War (1861-1865), nearly 450,000 New Yorkers served in the armed forces of this country to help reunite the nation. Army enlistees usually joined a local regiment alongside their neighbors and friends. At full strength, each regiment had over 1,000 soldiers including color bearers. Selected from among the regiment's bravest, color bearers carried the battle flags: a United States national flag, called a national color, and a New York State flag, called a regimental color. Both flags measured well over six feet in size. Regiments often carried smaller-sized flags in addition to the larger colors. Regardless of type or size, the battle flags symbolized the regiment and helped to keep the men aligned together while in battle, on the march or in camp.

The regimental color usually featured the name and number of the regiment, and symbols or slogans which expressed regional pride and patriotism. To show their support, communities presented their local regiments with unique battle flags in formal ceremonies which attracted large, enthusiastic crowds. When the Civil War began in 1861, flags of all types and sizes were made and flown as a wave of patriotism swept the country. This "flag mania" sensation established the flag as the pre-eminent symbol of the time and the most popular means of

patriotic expression for both citizens and soldiers. In a time before high-tech communications and social networks, flags were the most popular way for people to display their identities and allegiances.

Each regiment pledged to defend their flag and the community it represented. These revered battle flags were fiercely defended on the battlefield. If a regiment's flag was taken by the enemy, the men were humiliated. A soldier daring and heroic enough to capture an enemy's flag was honored for his deed, and in many instances, received the nation's highest military medal, the Medal of Honor.

Throughout four long years of war, the flag never lost its significance to soldier or civilian. Though a battle flag might be tattered, torn or pierced by enemy fire, its value never diminished. As the state's regiments returned home from war, the men brought back with them their beloved battle flags, and left them with state officials so that they would remain as a lasting testament to the courage and suffering of the citizens and soldiers of New York State.

**Activity: *Civil War Heroes on the Million Dollar Staircase***

See how many of the following Civil War connected people you can find carved in stone on the Million Dollar Staircase. (The names are underneath the carvings.) Check the ones you find

President Abraham Lincoln

Frederick Douglass

President Ulysses S. Grant

Clara Barton

Elmina Keeler Spencer

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Walt Whitman

John Brown

General Philip H. Sheridan

General William Tecumseh Sherman

General Henry Warner Slocum

General John Wool

General Winfield Scott

General Winfield Scott Hancock

For extra credit choose two or more of these people to research. Who were they? Why would they be chosen to be honored on the Million Dollar Staircase?

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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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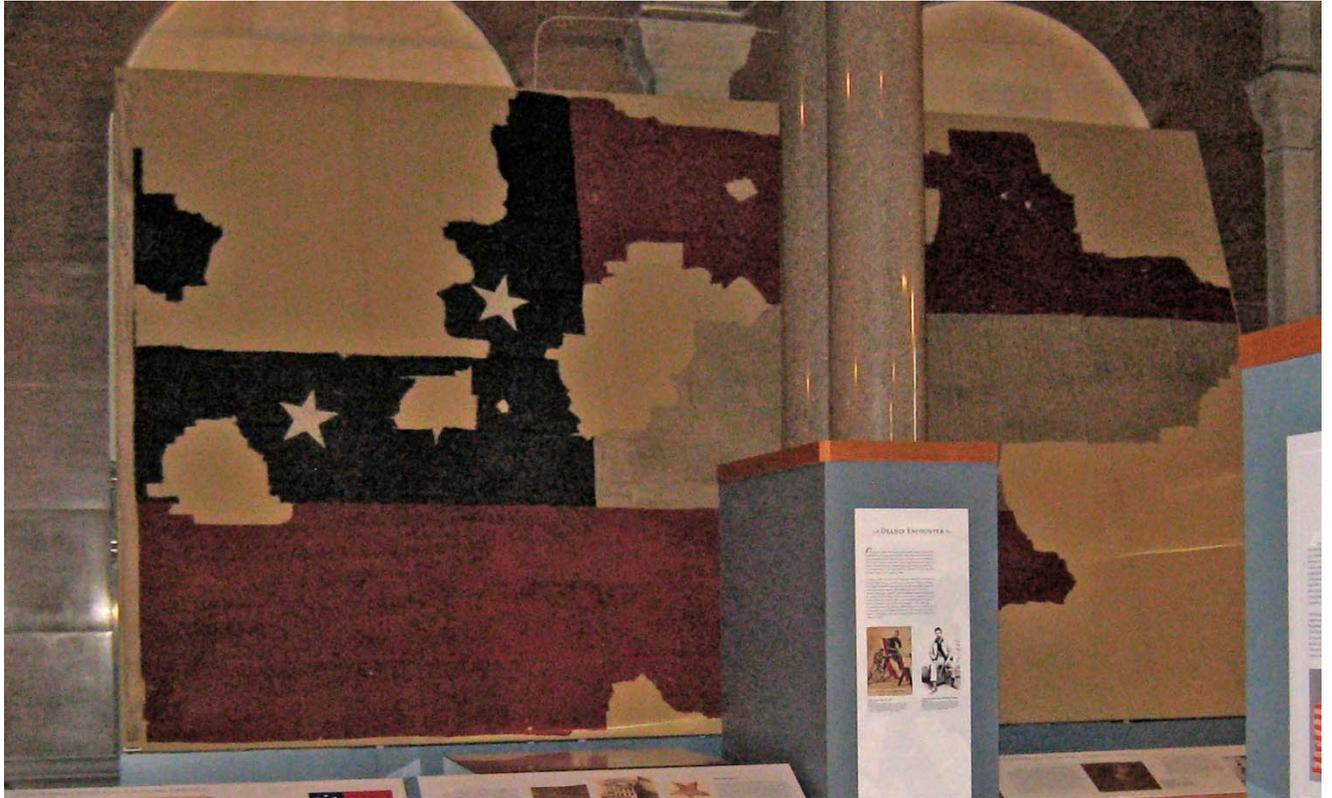
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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If you were going to choose a person from today to add to the famous faces on the Million Dollar Staircase, who would you choose and why?

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## Activity: *It's All About the Flags*

See what you can discover about each flag in the exhibition. Gather information by examining each flag and reading the informational panels. Complete the following worksheets for each flag.



### **The Marshall House Flag**

The Marshall House Flag, a Confederate National Flag, is very similar in design to the United States National Flag. The flag was locally made and placed atop the Marshall House Tavern in Alexandria, Virginia, in April 1861. Colonel Elmer Ellsworth from New York died while removing the flag from the building on May 24, 1861.

Who made this flag and why did the tavern owner place such a huge flag atop his building?

Why are pieces missing from the flag?



### **National Color, 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment, New York State Militia**

This silk national color was presented to the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment on May 23, 1861, at Camp Cameron, Washington, D.C., at a big ceremony with President Abraham Lincoln in attendance.

Who made this flag for the regiment?

The flag includes a small label. What does the label say and why was it added to the flag?



## **United States National Flag**

This small, silk United States National Flag with 33 printed stars was waved by a citizen in New York City on April 19, 1861.

What big event occurred on April 19, 1861 in New York City?

Are American flags still waved today? When?



### **Regimental Color, 20<sup>th</sup> Regiment, New York State Militia**

The 20<sup>th</sup> Regiment received this blue, silk regimental color embroidered with the Arms of the State of New York on August 31, 1858, from the citizens of Kingston and Roundout, New York.

What nickname appears on the flag and why is it there?

What other inscription appears on the flag?



## **“Prince of Wales” Flag**

This silk flag was presented to the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment in March 1861 and was later carried during the war’s first major battle, the Battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861.

Who presented this flag to the regiment and what event does it commemorate?

What symbol appears on the flag?

What do we know about this regiment from the color of this flag and its symbol?



### **Fort Albany Flag**

The 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment, New York State Militia from Albany, New York, constructed Fort Albany near Washington, D.C. and raised this flag over the fort at its opening on July 4, 1861.

How and why did the regiment acquire this flag?

Why would Henry Sanders save this flag?



## Standard, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Cavalry, New York Volunteers

Known as the "Harris Light Cavalry," the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry received this flag on December 5, 1861, at Arlington Heights near Washington, D.C. The flag includes the inspirational slogan, "In God is our Trust."

Who is depicted on this flag and why?

Who made this flag?



## **National Color, 40<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteers**

This silk national color was presented to the regiment on July 3, 1861, by New York City Mayor Fernando Wood on behalf of the Union Defense Committee.

What name is painted on this flag?

Why does the name appear on this flag?