Old Civil War Vet Goes Home

A seasoned veteran of the American Civil War, long missing from its home in the Deep South, has at last been repatriated to Alabama, its native state.

The “veteran,” is the battle flag of the First Regiment, Alabama Volunteer Infantry. It has been stored in the collection of the Nebraska State Historical Society since 1949, when it was donated to the NSHS along with other artifacts from the Nebraska chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the veterans’ organization of Union Civil War soldiers.

It was returned to Alabama May 24 on the steps of the Cannon Congressional House Office Building in Washington, D.C., in a ceremony arranged by Nebraska First District Congressman Jeff Fortenberry of Lincoln. Also attending were Second District Congressman Lee Terry of Omaha, two members of the Alabama congressional delegation, and representatives of the NSHS and the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

Fortenberry, a Civil War history buff and a member of the Congressional Battlefield Caucus, an organization dedicated to preserving the country’s military history, learned of the NSHS’s intention to return the flag from a newspaper article.

“We couldn’t be more excited to lend some decorum and formality to this important event,” Fortenberry said.

Presenting the flag to the Alabama delegation, NSHS Director and CEO Michael J. Smith said, “We are delighted to be here today to share this piece of history not only with the people of Alabama but with the American people.”

The flag was accepted by Ed Bridges, NSHS curator Deb Arenz (third from left) unfurls the flag with Reps. Jeff Fortenberry (fourth), Lee Terry (fifth), and Alabama officials.

Continued on page 2
“Now, after 145 years, the flag that was missing in action is finally coming home to Alabama,” said Bradley.

During the breezy outdoor ceremony the delicate, frayed, wool-and-cotton flag remained in its acid-free box. “If we unfurl it, we’ll be running after little pieces” said NSHS Museum Curator Deb Arenz, who packed the flag and carried it on the flight to Washington. It was later displayed inside the House Office Building.

Its seven stars represent the seven states that first seceded from the Union. Its red and white bars mimic those of the original Confederate national flag. The dates Nov. 22 and 23, 1861, are battle honors commemorating the unit’s significant participation in a Civil War engagement in Florida.

Aernz explained that the history of the flag, long stored with other Civil War memorabilia, had only recently been learned. “We discovered it through the assistance of a flag historian and many fine genealogists who post endless amounts of information on the Internet,” said Aernz.

“The transfer of this flag to the people of the state of Alabama is very appropriate,” Arenz added. “The Alabama archive has a strong flag collection and an obvious interest and dedication to the preservation of these flags.” A collection of Alabama flags can be viewed online at www.archives.state.al.us/referenc/flags/intro.html.

The flag was made in Montgomery, Alabama, in spring 1861, and presented to the First Alabama Volunteers in November 1861 following their participation in the successful bombardment of forts Barrancas and McRee in Florida. In 1862 the regiment surrendered at Tiptonville, Tennesee, and the flag was confiscated by Brig. Gen. Eleazer Arthur Paine, commander of the Fourth Division of Maj. Gen. John Pope’s Army of the Mississippi (USA).

Passed down to Paine’s son, Phelps, the flag came from Illinois to Nebraska in 1870. Settling first near Plattsmouth, Paine later moved to Lincoln, then to Omaha, where he was active in Republican politics and the GAR.

Paine died in Omaha in 1919 and is buried in Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln. The Alabama flag was given to the GAR at about the time of Phelps’ death, and donated to the NSHS thirty years later. ☺
Lincoln, July 2007

In his marvelous book, Big Russ and Me, Tim Russert reflects on those who influenced him growing up in Buffalo, New York. The primary influence was, of course, Tim’s father, “Big Russ.” But right behind him were the Jesuit fathers at Canisius High School. To Tim they were teachers, disciplinarians, role models, and sources of never-to-be-forgotten wisdom.

A recent e-mail from a classmate served as a reminder of my own experience. The message noted that this is the fiftieth anniversary of the ordination of two of the teacher-priests we knew at Aquin Central Catholic High School in Freeport, Illinois.

Father Ed Gillespie is a Chicagoan, a lifelong Cubs fan, and a priest of the diocese of Rockford. He was active at the high school, teaching religion and generally serving to give us some perspective on life. As hard-driving high school students and athletes we occasionally thought we knew just about everything there was to know. Through his quiet voice at school, a word after mass on Sunday or at a party at the Smith dairy farm, Father Gillespie meted out wisdom, quietly suggesting that as unlikely as it seemed, it might just be possible that not only didn’t we know all the answers, we might not even know the questions. How right he was!

Father James Larson is a Scandinavian from the Illinois prairie, big, rugged, and a force as the coach of the school’s football linemen. I will always remember coming off the football field after another “three and out” and tossing my helmet in frustration. Before I knew what happened I was about two feet off the ground with Father Larson bellowing in my face, “Do you want to play football? Get that helmet on your head!” Concise? I guess! In a very few words I was reminded that this was a game after all, and that the way to succeed lay in the serious application of what we had been taught.

Two men of very different personalities and approaches to teaching. Two strong influences. Both left lessons for my life.

Today, living and working in Nebraska, I reflect regularly on the formal and informal education of our future generations. This is an important area of service for the Nebraska State Historical Society. History is all about the stories of the past, whether in New York, Illinois, or Nebraska. In sharing our personal stories, we build a community of people committed to raising generations to be not as good as we are, but really much better. Please share your history with the young people in your lives.

Michael J. Smith
Director/CEO

PS: Yes, we won the game!
Fort Robinson State Park near Crawford, Nebraska, attracted some 160 participants. They came from Alexandria, Virginia, to Zahl, North Dakota, and places in between, including many from Nebraska.

Attendees heard scholarly papers on the army mule, army wagons, Indian horses and horse-gear, U.S. cavalry weapons, an early army veterinarian, recreational use of horses in the frontier army, and Nokota horses, a breed descended from Spanish and Native American stock. A concluding paper recalled the twilight years of the last cavalry horses that lived into the mid-twentieth century in retirement at Fort Riley, Kansas. Some of those horses were issued at Fort Robinson.

Tours of historic sites and a display of Nokota horses were other conference highlights. An address at the closing banquet by Robert M. Utley, retired National Park Service chief historian, summed up the frontier army’s contributions to the American military tradition.

The conference is underwritten by donations to the NSHS Foundation and is held every two or three years in late April.
Gas Prices Got You Down? Then Discover Nebraska!

Don’t let record-high gas prices rob you of a summer getaway. Instead, discover amazing places rich with history and culture right here in Nebraska, all open free to NSHS members.

In the west are Fort Robinson and Chimney Rock. The fort, near Crawford, looms large in American history from the Indian Wars and the Dakota Gold Rush through World War II. Chimney Rock, near Bayard, is an important landmark on the Overland Trail, and the gateway to the unique landscapes of the Wildcat Range.

Head south to McCook to discover the home of Senator George Norris, a statesman who helped shape the Nebraska we know today. At Red Cloud in south-central Nebraska see places where esteemed Nebraska author Willa Cather set stories and novels that tell the world about Nebraska and its people.

In the northeast visit Neligh Mill in Neligh to explore Nebraska’s role in feeding the world. At Bancroft discover places and people—the majestic Missouri River, the Plains Indians, the mountain men—that enlivened the epic poetry of Nebraska Laureate John Neihardt.

And don’t forget the Museum of Nebraska History in Lincoln, a great place to discover the state’s amazing past through the most comprehensive and fully interpreted displays of this state’s history and historical artifacts anywhere.

These NSHS sites and museums are great places to visit in themselves, and the friendly, knowledgeable staff members there can also help you find other close-to-home Nebraska wonders. Expensive gas or cheap gas, discovering Nebraska can be a great vacation.

For more information on NSHS Historic Sites visit www.nebraskahistory.org.

From the Museum Store

As you visit NSHS Historic Sites this summer don’t overlook the site gift shops with their wide selection of Nebraska-related books and unique merchandise. The Museum of Nebraska History in Lincoln, the Fort Robinson Museum near Crawford, and Chimney Rock National Historic Site near Bayard all have full-scale shops. Smaller selections are available at Neligh Mill in Neligh and the George W. Norris house in McCook.

Your NSHS member discount applies at all the museum stores. For more information call 1-800-833-6747 or see the online catalog at www.nebraskahistory.org.
Save the Dates for “Saving Nebraska’s Treasures”

Learn more about saving family and community treasures this summer by enrolling in four free distance-learning workshops sponsored by the “Saving Nebraska’s Treasures: Preventive Conservation for Families, Museums, and Libraries” project. The workshops will be delivered to receiving locations throughout the state via satellite uplink.

Workshop Dates & Subjects

- **June 14—Organic Materials**
  Textiles, leather, feather, hide, bone, and other organic materials.

- **July 12—Inorganic Materials**
  Glass, ceramic, stone, and other inorganic materials.

- **August 16—Paper**
  Paper, photographs, books and other paper-based objects.

- **September 11—Digitization**
  Care of material to be digitized for the Nebraska Library Commission’s “Nebraska Memories” website.

The workshops grow out of a partnership among the NSHS, NET, and the NLC, and will be accompanied by a one-hour television program, “Saving Nebraska’s Treasures,” to be broadcast statewide on NET on July 26, and a soon-to-be-launched website incorporating information from the workshops and the television program. Funding is provided in part by grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Workshops are scheduled for 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., CDT. They also will be available as streaming video on the NET website, [www.netnebraska.org](http://www.netnebraska.org). To register or request more information contact the NSHS by telephone at 402-471-3272 or by e-mail at treasures@nebraskahistory.org.

Land Patent Book Sponsors Sought

The NSHS is seeking sponsors to purchase new Nebraska volumes in the series Family Maps of Land Patents Books for land-grant states published by Arphax ([www.arphax.com](http://www.arphax.com)).

Available now are the Loup, Sioux, and Thomas County volumes. Logan County will be released soon.

If you wish to sponsor one or more volumes for the NSHS Library, contact Cindy Drake for more information at 402-471-4786 or cdrake@nebraskahistory.org.
UPCOMING EVENTS

Unless otherwise noted, all events are free and open to the public.

July 1  •  10 a.m.–5 p.m.
Genoa U.S. Indian School Celebration
Demonstrations, film, lecture, tours,
Native American foods & crafts
Genoa
nfcarls@megavision.com 402-993-6055

July 6  •  11 a.m. & 12 noon; 2 & 3 p.m.
Fabulous Free Fun Fridays in July
Activities for grades 1–5 and 6–8
(registration required)
jkeetle@nebraskahistory.org 402-471-4757
Museum of Nebraska History
15th & P streets, Lincoln 402-471-4754

July 13  •  11 a.m. & 12 noon; 2 & 3 p.m.
Fabulous Free Fun Fridays in July
Activities for grades 1–5 and 6–8
Museum of Nebraska History
15th & P streets, Lincoln 402-471-4754

July 19  •  12 noon
“The Everyday Life of the Nebraska Civil War Soldier”
Jim Potter, Senior Research Historian, NSHS

Brown Bag Lecture Series
Museum of Nebraska History
15th & P streets, Lincoln 402-471-4754

July 20  •  11 a.m. & 12 noon; 2 & 3 p.m.
Fabulous Free Fun Fridays in July
Activities for grades 1–5 and 6–8
Museum of Nebraska History
15th & P streets, Lincoln 402-471-4754

July 27  •  11 a.m. & 12 noon; 2 & 3 p.m.
Fabulous Free Fun Fridays in July
Activities for grades 1–5 and 6–8
Museum of Nebraska History
15th & P streets, Lincoln 402-471-4754

August 5
Forty-second Annual Neihardt Day
Art exhibit, presentations on Crazy Horse and Neihardt. Lunch available, 11:30 a.m.–1 p.m.
Program, 1:30 p.m. (outdoors).
John G. Neihardt State Historic Site
306 W. Elm Street, Bancroft
neihardt@gpcom.net 888-777-4667

August 5–12
Twenty-fifth Annual Oregon-California Trails Association Convention
Speakers, workshops, tours, meetings.
(registration required)
Gering
chimrock@scottsluff.net 308-586-2581
npvm@earthlink.net 308-436-5411

August 16  •  12 noon
“Ethanol”
John Carter, Senior Research Associate, NSHS

Brown Bag Lecture Series
Museum of Nebraska History

September 7–9  •  various times daily
Bread 'n Jam Festival
Bake-off, vendors, food demonstrations, music.
Neligh Mill State Historic Site
N Street at Wylie Drive, Neligh
nelighpub@frontiernet.net 402-887-5140

September 20  •  12 noon
“The University of Nebraska's Cather Digital Archives”
Andy Jewell, University Libraries, UN-L

Brown Bag Lecture Series
Museum of Nebraska History
We are having a great time,” wrote Lincoln High School first baseman George Binger from Liverpool in 1938. Binger was one of three Lincoln players on Team USA playing England for the World Baseball Championship. Pitcher Clyde Dean and second baseman Leo Benson also made the team.

Team USA lost in Liverpool 3-0, and the English team won the series four games to one. The International Baseball Association lists England, perhaps the first team to beat the U.S. at its own game, as the first true World Series winner.

George Binger’s uniform was donated to the NSHS in April by his widow, Mary Binger of Lincoln.