

Wisconsin Historical Society: Americana Corner grant helps Wisconsin Historical Society preserve 20-star Civil War loyalty flag

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Historical Society is pleased to announce that it has been awarded a \$10,000 Preserving America Grant from Americana Corner to support an assessment, conservation and documentation project on a 20-star American flag that was used to pledge loyalty to the Union during the Civil War. The flag has been part of the Society's North American history collection since 1896.

"We are grateful to have received this generous grant from Americana Corner," said Christian Overland, the Ruth & Hartley Barker Director and CEO of the Society. "Collecting and sharing the stories of American history has been essential to the Society's mission since its founding in 1846, and this funding allows us to preserve an amazing artifact used by citizens in the North when they moved to unify our nation by embracing the principles of justice, equality, and liberty. This artifact will continually remind us that democracy is only as strong as our continued promise to fight for it."

Americana Corner is an online resource focused on helping charitable organizations across the country tell the story of America from its founding through its first century. It was created in 2020 by Tom Hand, the founder and former owner of Wisconsin's Gilman Cheese Corporation. The West Point graduate and Army veteran is also a former member of the Wisconsin Historical Foundation's Board of Directors.

"I am thrilled to be able to help others across America tell our country's wonderful story," said Hand, whose organization in 2023 awarded 119 grants up to \$10,000 to

charities in 35 states, for a total of \$835,000.

Horace Beach, owner of a dry-goods store and a former president of the Prairie du Chien Union League, donated the flag to the Wisconsin Historical Society in July 1896. During the Civil War, Union Leagues began to emerge across the North to promote loyalty to the Union. In a letter to the Society, Beach shared that the flag lay over an altar during member initiation ceremonies from 1862 to 1865 and was flown at half-mast over the city of Prairie du Chien after President Abraham Lincoln's assassination.

For more than 125 years, the tattered flag has helped the Society tell the story of political struggle during the Civil War and Wisconsin's military history through a local perspective. However, its fragile state has kept it from being publicly displayed for several years. This support from Americana Corner allows the Society to launch a project to preserve the flag and further explore its pre-1862 history, as many unanswered questions remain.

"Seeing this flag in person inspires curiosity, taking us back in time and connecting us to an American experience in the 19th century," said Jill Sterrett, the Society's director of collections. "This funding from Americana Corner allows us to do the work that will create new opportunities to share this flag and its rich history with the public, including inside Wisconsin's new history center."

The Society is in the midst of a multi-year project to build a new 100,000-square-foot history center, with construction on Wisconsin's Capitol Square in Madison scheduled to begin in 2024.

Photo Link to Civil War Loyalty Flag:

<https://whs.photoshelter.com/galleries/C0000wvIXCtxweT8/G0000x6Fqk6wA7yk/Press-Release-Images>

More on the Civil War Loyalty Flag:

<https://wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS2633>

More on the Wisconsin history center project:

<https://wisconsinhistory.org/historycenter>

More on Americana Corner:

<https://www.americanacorner.com/>

About Wisconsin Historical Society

The Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, ranks as one of the largest, most active and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. As both a state agency and a private membership organization, its mission is to help people connect to the past by collecting, preserving and sharing stories. The Wisconsin Historical Society serves millions of people every year through a wide range of sites, programs and services. For more information, visit www.wisconsinhistory.org.

The Wisconsin Historical Foundation, a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization, receives grants and private contributions benefitting the Wisconsin Historical Society and administers the membership program.