



A Flag from the Ladies of Chautauqua
County

By Joel Babcock and staff of the Fenton
History Center

The most recognized symbol of freedom in the world is the American Flag. Our flags have flown in battle over Mt. Suribachi on Iwo Jima, Normandy France, and over Ft. McHenry in Baltimore Harbor where the original Star Spangled Banner waved. The flag of the 112th New York Infantry (the Chautauqua Regiment) is part of the Fenton History Center's collection. A Regiment's battle flag meant more to the soldiers than just representing its colors. It was the symbol they followed into combat. The flag was always front and center of the formation and the men knew wherever they were on the battlefield, they kept the same position to the flag and they could be assured they were still within the confines of their Regiment or Brigade. If the flag went down another man would retrieve and carry the flag on as it went through the carnage of some of the most horrific fighting this country

has ever seen.

That flag was given to the Regiment by, and in the name of, the "ladies of Chautauqua County". The particular group of ladies is unknown. It was accepted by Col. Jeremiah Drake in 1862 and it was carried into battle at Zuni, Deserted House, Siege of Suffolk Va, raid and fight at Hanover Junction, Siege of Fort Wagner Charleston Harbor, raid to St. Johns Island, Jacksonville Fl, Bermuda Hundred, Drurys Bluff, Cold Harbor, Siege of Petersburg (including the fight when the mine was blown up), battle of Deep Bottom, and Chapins Farm. There were other fights for the 112th of course, but this particular flag was returned to Jamestown after the fight and charge at Ft. Gilmer, Chapins Farm Va., Sept 29, 1864 under the command of Colonel Ephraim A Ludwick. Lt. Col. John Fellows Smith, Ludwick's successor, signed the letter returning the flag to Col. Augustus Allen, Jamestown Military District Commandant in October 1864.

As Chaplain William L. Hyde stated in a letter to Chautauqua County from Virginia, after a horrible charge at Forts Harrison and Gilmer where many of the men were killed and maimed, "*The tattered flag pierced by bullets and its staff broken is being prepared to send to Jamestown. Glorious old flag, it has traversed the length of our sea coast from New York to Florida, and the men who have fought beneath its folds have been true to their banner in every contest.*" Cpl. Ebenezer Skellie was awarded the Medal of Honor for Valor in carrying the flag to the Confederate works before he himself suffered horrible wounds and lost a leg. Just four months before, the same Flag led the Regiment into the fight at Cold Harbor VA, where 153

men of the 112th went down including their beloved Colonel Jeremiah Drake. The 112th was in the first line of these charges. They were later recognized as one of the top fighting Regiments of the war.

On July 4, 1865 the Flags of the New York Volunteer Regiments were publicly presented to the Governor, Reuben E. Fenton, to be deposited with the Bureau of Military Statistics. Later they were exhibited in the State Capital and now are being conserved through the New York State Battle Flag Preservation Project and shown at the New York State Military Museum.

At the organizing of the 10th reunion of the 112th Regiment, former Col. Ephraim Ludwick corresponded with his friend and first County Clerk, Lt. Herman Sixbey (who had been shot in the face and severely wounded at Cemetery Hill, after the Petersburg Mine explosion fight July 30, 1864)...

July 15, 1872

Dear Sixby,

In reply to yours of the 4th Inst allow me to assure you that it will afford me much pleasure to meet with you at your Reunion. As yet I am unable to say certainly whether I can be absent at that time. In reference to the flags... the one presented by the ladies of Chautauqua County, I hope you will be able to secure the flag for the occasion as it would add largely to the interest.

I should much enjoy forming the Old Regiment again under our War torn and tattered Colors. It makes me all aglow with interest just to think of it.

Truly Yours

E. A. Ludwick

This reunion may be the reason the Fenton has the flag in its collections.

Please visit the Fenton History Center where you can see the Battle Flag of the 112th NY Volunteers, tattered and worn - one of the greatest symbols of Freedom in our country. A symbol of camaraderie, of valor, of sacrifice, blood and tears. A flag that helped give our country a new birth of freedom, for all men... right here in Jamestown.

Time, light, temperature and gravity are the greatest enemies of our Regimental flag. Conservation of Civil War flags is a highly expensive endeavor. The work of conserving the flag must be accomplished as soon as possible before any further damage occurs to our Regiment's flag. If you wish to support this project, please contact Joni Blackman, Director at the Fenton History Center at 716-664-6256.