

Larry Lowenthal, "The Homecoming of the Flags: The Return of a Civil War Flag to Springfield Massachusetts" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 18, No. 2 (Summer 1990).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

You may use content in this archive for your personal, non-commercial use. Please contact the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* regarding any further use of this work:

masshistoryjournal@westfield.ma.edu

Funding for digitization of issues was provided through a generous grant from MassHumanities.



Some digitized versions of the articles have been reformatted from their original, published appearance. When citing, please give the original print source (volume/ number/ date) but add "retrieved from HJM's online archive at <http://www.westfield.ma.edu/mhj/>."



THE HOMECOMING OF THE FLAGS

by Larry Lowenthal

On November 19, 1988, in a tasteful and dignified ceremony at Springfield's Quadrangle, men in the blue and gray uniforms of another era gathered to witness the return of a flag that had been captured during the Civil War, a century and a quarter before. The passions of the earlier time had long since subsided. Reconciliation was no longer necessary, so the mood was one of mutual remembrance and respect. Few in attendance were aware that a similar but grander ceremony had taken place just over a century before, an event all the more dramatic because Civil War veterans themselves had prepared and staged it. At that time their act was a living, emotionally-charged gesture of conciliation. Unlike the spectators of 1988, the participants in the 1886 event did not have to search their minds to imagine the intense feelings symbolized by the flags.

To some extent the ceremony of November 19, occurring on the 125th anniversary of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, was the result of a series of fortunate accidents. Until a few months earlier, no one had been aware that such a flag existed in Springfield, and it took persistent digging by dedicated local historians, notably Paul Byrne, Jr., to uncover its tangled but fascinating history. This research revealed the existence of related flags and the earlier ceremony, as well as the mystery of a similar Civil War flag whose whereabouts are unknown. There was considerable confusion caused by the number of flags and the uncertainty about their history -- partly due to the physical deterioration of the flags themselves and the inadequate documentary record.

The flag that was returned with great honor to North Carolina officials on November 19 had been captured by the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts Regiment at the battle of Roanoke Island, North Carolina, in 1862. An early Confederate national

flag consisting of three bars and ten stars, it was presumed to date from May of 1861, after North Carolina became the tenth state to



November 19, 1988 Ceremony held at the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, Springfield, Massachusetts

join the Confederacy and before it was known that Virginia had increased the number to eleven. Other than the stars and bars, the flag contained no distinctive markings, and it was only by a process of deductive reasoning that researchers concluded it was probably the "personal flag" of Lieutenant-Colonel Wharton Green, commander of the Second North Carolina Battalion.¹

1. [Paul Byrne, Jr.], "Facts about the Flag," unpublished handout, [1988], in Springfield Vertical File, Archives, Connecticut Valley Historical Museum.

In one of the many coincidences that give the story of the flags the characteristics of a melodrama, the discovery of the North Carolina flag was the unexpected result of a search for the lost regimental flags of the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts -- the very regiment that had captured the North Carolina banner. In its origins and military record, the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts seems at first typical of the state volunteer regiments that made up the bulk of the Civil War armies. It experienced an ample measure of hardship, suffering, and loss, but so did most of the low-number regiments in the course of their service. Beneath the apparently routine surface, however, like a layer of marble under a covering of common rock, runs a rich vein of romance. For unknown and unpredictable reasons, not especially related to the character of the men who led it or served in it, romantic events and circumstances were associated with the Twenty-Seventh. A surprising number of these occurrences involved flags and the history of the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts is draped in flags.

To a populace imbued with Sir Walter Scott's idealized depiction of medieval life, flags represented the pageantry associated with that seemingly heroic era. This fascination with chivalric mythology was more pronounced in the South, but it was pervasive in the North as well. Additionally, in armies composed of locally-raised regiments, distinctive flags expressed hometown identity and helped preserve individuality in the masses of blue and gray. There was a deep emotional attachment by the volunteer soldiers to the silken banners which embodied so many solemn and sentimental associations. This is attested to by the number of men who died clutching the colors, as well as the number of soldiers' songs based on flag themes. After the war this reverential attitude persisted and manifested itself in the numerous statues which, although stylized, showed soldiers holding flags.

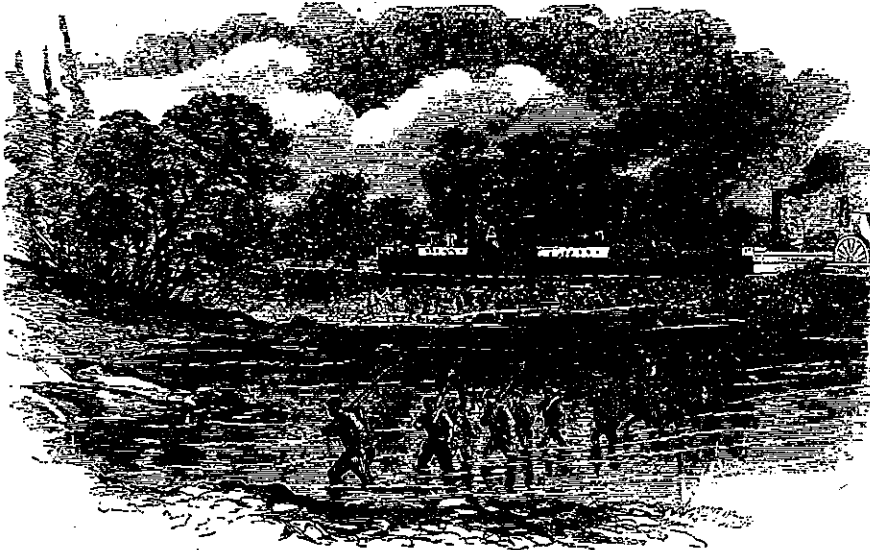
The remarkable linkage of the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts and flags began in the regiment's earliest days; although, at that point, there was little to differentiate it from hundreds of other units formed in the great rush of enthusiasm in the early months of war. Composed largely of men from the Connecticut Valley, the regiment was mustered in at what was called Camp Reed, located near what is now Mason Square in Springfield, and what was for many years known as Winchester Square. After a brief period of training, the 980 men marched to

the depot with banners waving through the streets of Springfield, then a city of about 15,000. It was a moving and unforgettable scene and one repeated in virtually every town, both North and South. On that stirring day in November of 1861, the regiment marched behind two flags, one national and one state, both provided by the Commonwealth.

The regiment's success in taking the Second Battalion flag at Roanoke Island on February 8, 1862, in its first action, proved to be only a prelude to greater accomplishments in the battle of New Bern.² This campaign in eastern North Carolina is commonly known as the "Burnside Expedition," after its commander, General Ambrose E. Burnside. The specific plan may have been conceived by General George B. McClellan, although it was part of the larger strategy of encircling or blockading the South. In addition to tightening the stranghold on the Confederacy, it was also hoped that Burnside's invasion would flank Norfolk and threaten the rail line to Petersburg and Richmond. With the exception of a few instances such as Charleston, the North invariably attained its objectives in these coastal assaults, although it could be argued that the objectives were too limited. Over time these campaigns eroded the South's will and ability to resist, although it seems that the final destruction of the Confederacy still required the defeat of the Army of Northern Virginia.

After consolidating his success at Roanoke Island, General Burnside moved on the important city of New Bern. Burnside and the naval commander, Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough, cooperated remarkably well. Together they conducted what may have been the largest amphibious assault in American history to that time -- a brilliant achievement considering the relative inexperience of their forces. Exactly the opposite was true of the defenders. Unable to oppose the landing below New Bern, they were compelled to fall back onto their main defensive position, called Fort Thompson. On March 14, 1862, an almost "set-piece" battle took place before this fortification. After four hours of hard fighting, some of the weaker North Carolina units cracked and a general rout followed.

2. Commonly spelled New Berne at the time of the Civil War; sometimes spelled as one word.



LANDING OF THE TROOPS BELOW NEWBURN.

Compared to the attention lavished on the Virginia, and to a lesser extent the Western theaters, the campaign in eastern North Carolina has received little notice. Roanoke Island, where several companies of Confederate reinforcements had landed just in time to be cut off and captured, was described by Emory M. Thomas in *The Confederate Nation* as "a classic Confederate

disaster," and the same could be said of New Bern.³ The inability of North Carolina troops to defend their home territory must have been distressing - one of many misfortunes that befell the Confederacy during this dismal period. Like the concurrent setbacks at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson in the West, Burnside's campaign shrunk the Confederacy's perimeter and depleted its limited strength.

Gen. Lawrence O'B. Branch, the youthful Confederate commander, had hoped to regroup and make a stand in New Bern itself, but his forces were too scattered. Northern troops quickly entered the town, and only their weariness prevented further pursuit of the disorganized Confederates. In the process, the federals captured the rebel camps at the Fairgrounds. Gen. Branch reported:

The ammunition and ordnance stores at New Berne were saved, and the camp equipage and baggage of the regiments would have been saved but we had not the field transportation with which to haul it to the railroad.⁴

This closing incident of the battle is described more vividly by a member of the Twenty-Seventh in a subsequent account to his hometown newspaper: "Tents and all the fixtures belonging to a camp were found in abundance, and we all slept in secesh tents, ate secesh bread from a secesh table, with secesh plates and knives and forks."⁵

Here the association of the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts with flags was irrevocably sealed. As described in accounts sent home, two companies of that regiment, which had already won a name for itself as a steady, hard-fighting unit, captured flags in the abandoned camps at the Fairgrounds. The descriptions are interesting not only for their depiction of the baggage Confederate officers carried at that stage, but also as an

3. Harper & Row, 1979, p. 123

4. U.S. Army (War Department), The War of the Rebellion: Official Records, XX: 246.

5. Northampton Gazette & Courier, April 8, 1862. "Secesh" means secessionist.

illustration of the Yankee propensity to collect souvenirs. The ease and rapidity with which this motley collection was transported to Massachusetts demonstrates the remarkably efficient supply and communication system with which the North was able to maintain a distant expeditionary force in the first year of the war.

A box of trophies taken by the soldiers of the 27th regiment at Newbern immediately after the battle there, has been sent to this town. It contains five rebel muskets or rifles with percussion locks, apparently serviceable weapons; two large ugly-looking Bowie knives, with leather cases and straps; nine cartridge boxes and belts; one canteen; one lieutenant's dress (coat and pants of Kentucky jean), coarse and dirty; one dirk cane, given to Lieut. Col. Lyman while on picket duty, by a contraband, [runaway slave] who said he took it from his master when he ran away; a prayer book taken at Roanoke; five pairs of coarse home-made cotton pants, new, taken from the quartermaster's department; one large silver spoon, found in camp at Roanoke; several jeweler's tools, found in the woods nine miles from Newbern; a beautiful silk flag; a Bible Dictionary; a nice pen holder, found in a rebel officer's tent; an elegant corkscrew; a lot of envelopes, letters, commissions, musket balls, percussion caps, &c.

The flag is the most valuable trophy of the lot. It is of nice silk, about six feet in length, has thirteen large stars, encircling the letters "N.C." and bears the following words, beautifully worked: - On one side: "Presented by the young ladies of Wayne Female College, Apr. 1861." On the other: "Goldsboro Rifles - Victory or Death." The flag was found in the camp of the 7th N.C. troops by a member of Company I, Capt. Wilcox, and by him

was presented to Capt. W., who sent it home to be deposited in the Museum at Springfield.⁶

Elsewhere in the same report it was noted that Lieutenant Henry C. Dwight had sent home a rifle made by Robbins & Lawrence, of Windsor, Vermont, and a "very rusty" Springfield musket of 1851. The latter would have been an obsolete smoothbore. Scattered accounts such as this, while not statistically valid, testify to the variety of Confederate armament and show that even as early as 1862, the northern forces were so well-equipped that they could treat captured serviceable weapons as souvenirs. Springfield Armory production was not adequate to meet the demands of the immensely expanded federal armies, but the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts was armed with nearly equivalent British Enfields.

Springfield was soon captivated by another lot of fascinating trophies collected by the victorious Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts:

A trunkful of trophies from the rebel camp at Newbern has been sent by Lieut. Peter S. Bailey, cashier of the Agawam bank. The trunk, which evidently belonged to an officer, is a very superior one, iron bound and of russet leather. The object of greatest interest is a confederate flag, 3 1/2 by 4 1/2 feet of pretty nice make and material, bearing the three bars and eleven stars, and the inscriptions - "Haw River Boys," "On to Victory." The motto is one that the federal troops can "haw haw" over. The other articles were a sapper's and miner's sword, manufactured at Chicopee; a ferocious looking knife or "Yankee slayer" as it was called; a cavalry jacket with the regular U.S. buttons of which some poor prisoner had doubtless been robbed; a company roll of the North Carolina volunteers, on Manilla paper for want of the Yankee article; the record book of an officer of the guard, extending back to February 1861 . . . ;

6. Ibid., April 15, 1862.

Hardee's and Scott's infantry tactics, several editions; Bayonet exercise, which the rebels couldn't learn efficiently; Articles of War of the confederate states; a copy of Byron's poems, which had been read much more than a Bible that lay by its side; several badly spelled letters; a handsome guitar with which the "chivalry" once entertained the secesh women.⁷

The Goldsboro Rifles was officially Company A of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina, and the "Haw River Boys" (more correctly, the Haw River Rifles) was Company D of the Thirty-Fifth North Carolina.⁸ This company had volunteered to stay behind to become the rear guard of the entire force; the remainder of the regiment broke under pressure during the battle, a critical factor in the Confederate defeat.⁹ The coincidence of finding two Twenty-Seventh regiments facing one another -- a touch that even most nineteenth century novelists would have shunned -- contributes to the legend of the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts, but has also created confusion. Authors of some later accounts assumed it to be a printer's error, and concluded that the captured flag really belonged to the Seventh North Carolina.

After a few days on exhibit in Northampton, the Goldsboro Rifles flag was deposited in the museum at Springfield. Nothing further was heard about the captured flags for twenty years after the end of the war. When they made their public reappearance, the flags moved from the realm of antiquarian interest, if not fetishism, and assumed a broader historical significance. The proud Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts, having achieved a wartime record for fortitude and sacrifice that would stand comparison with any regiment in the service, formed an active veterans' association in 1872, with a full range of social and benevolent functions. After their two decades of obscurity, the

7. Springfield Republican, April 3, 1862.

8. Louis Manarin, comp. North Carolina Troops 1861-1865, A Roster, (Raleigh: North Carolina State Department of Archives and History, various dates).

9. Official Records, XX: 263 (Report of James Sinclair, cmdg.)

flags returned to the limelight rather unexpectedly at the fourteenth annual reunion of the regiment, held at North Wilbraham and Ludlow in late September of 1885. At the start of this gathering, it was reported that [then] Captain Bailey, who had kept the Haw River flag during the intervening years, had in the previous spring "signalled to [the] Wilcox [Grand Army of the Republic] post his desire to have it returned."¹⁰

This naturally stimulated interest in the other captured (Goldsboro) flag, and a member of the Wilcox post sent a letter to the Goldsboro Rifles, which had maintained an existence, on August 3, 1885, advising that they had the flag and were "desirous of returning it to its rightful owners." This brought a prompt response from Captain W. T. Hallowell of the Goldsboro Rifles, then Company D of the First Regiment of the North Carolina State Guard. After an effusive prelude, Hallowell observed that "We have just secured an armory, and we have been trying to collect the different mementoes of the old company for presentation. Hence your communication comes at an opportune time."¹¹

It had become apparent that the flags belonged to the Twenty-Seventh, rather than to the Wilcox post, so that any action to return them had to be taken by the regimental association. Captain Hallowell's letter drew an enthusiastic response, and the association members voted unanimously to return the flags. "The veterans of the old 27th have done well," observed the *Springfield Republican* on September twenty-third. Having resolved to send the flags "home," the next question concerned the mechanics of the transfer, and for this purpose a special committee of three was formed. Captain Hallowell apparently assumed that the flags would be sent back by ordinary express, with no unusual ceremony. However, as the *Republican* noted, "a strong feeling prevails among the members of the committee, and the regiment at large, that at least one comrade should go with the flags and see them safely delivered."¹²

10. *Springfield Republican*, September 22, 1885. The Wilcox post was named for an officer of the Twenty-Seventh who died at the battle of Cold Harbor.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Springfield Republican*, September 25, 1885.

The Haw River flag was not yet forgotten, but the same article reported that nothing was known about the status of the "Haw River Boys." It added that W. P. Derby, secretary and historian of the Twenty-Seventh and one of the members of the special committee, would write to Captain Hallowell in an effort to locate survivors of the company. If such correspondence took place, it did not solve the mystery, and the "Haw River Boys" remained unidentified. North Carolina was probably only in the preliminary stages of assembling its wartime records, for the official compilation, Walter Clark's authoritative *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War 1861-'65* did not appear until 1901. Since the "Haw River Boys" had not been part of Hallowell's regiment and did not maintain an existence after the war, it is possible that he was unaware of their identity and origin. One of the paradoxes of the situation is that the Haw River flag, which prompted the initiative, seemed to drop out of sight after the 1885 reunion, and it was apparently never mentioned again. This was true even though Peter S. Bailey, its captor and custodian, was one of the vice presidents of the Twenty-Seventh association in 1885 and was appropriately named to the special committee.

By the end of the century, the return of flags and similar wartime trophies had become commonplace, culminating in a joint resolution of Congress in 1905 "To return to the proper authorities certain Union and Confederate battle flags" (applying only to certain flags in the custody of the War Department).¹³ In 1885, however, a gesture of this kind was rare, perhaps unprecedented. The question of what inspired the men of the Twenty-Seventh to perform a spontaneous act of reconciliation seemingly in advance of its time is what raises the flag episode above the level of a colorful anecdote. In contemporary and later reporting on the subject, no motive was offered to account for this extraordinary but unanimous gesture.

In 1885 the conjunction of a variety of events served to remind veterans of the Twenty-Seventh of their mortality. It was the twentieth anniversary of the war's end, and any decennial took on memorial overtones. Each reunion brought a somber roll-call of deaths -- seven were reported in 1885. Twenty years after the

13. U.S. Statutes at Large, XXXIII, Pt. 1: 1284, February 28, 1905.

war, most of the Twenty-Seventh's veterans were young in age, but many were prematurely broken down by the wounds, privations, and diseases of war and captivity. In the regimental history, published in 1883, it was estimated that only about 500 of the 1557 men who served during the course of the war had survived.¹⁴

The death of their former commander, General Ulysses S. Grant, on July 23, 1885 after an agonizing and gallant struggle against cancer, deeply affected the men of the Twenty-Seventh. By his generous terms at Appomattox, Grant had won the respect of his foes, so that his death united the nation in sympathy. Captain Hallowell alluded to this in his letter, saying that Grant "was nevertheless a considerate foe and treated our beloved Gen. Lee with the utmost kindness and respect. Hence we of the South mourn with you over his death. . . ." General Grant's passing recalled the prolonged national anguish associated with the death of President James A. Garfield four years earlier.

Almost concurrently with the 1885 annual reunion of the Twenty-Seventh occurred the dedication of the Soldiers' Monument at Springfield's Court Square, an event sure to provoke thoughts of settling accounts with history. At the ceremony on September 29, Colonel William S. Shurtleff, "President of the Day" and former commander of the Forty-Sixth Regiment, observed that "The vacancies that almost daily death creates in their number cannot be filled. Their ranks can not be reinforced. They can have no successors."¹⁵ In the same year, the dedication of Oak Grove Cemetery in Springfield refocused attention on mortality among the men who had experienced too much of it firsthand.

Another of the melodramatic incidents that highlight the history of the Twenty-Seventh may have turned thoughts toward returning wartime trophies. In 1882, a sword captured from Captain J. L. Skinner of the Twenty-Seventh during the battle of Drewry's Bluff, Virginia, was unexpectedly returned to the captain, then living in Sacramento, California. The donor was the

14. W. P. Derby, Bearing Arms in the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts Regiment (Boston, privately published: 1883), p. 521.

15. Springfield Republican, September 30, 1885. The 46th, a 9-months' regiment, spent most of its service in North Carolina as sort of a younger brother of the 27th.

sister of the Confederate officer who had seized it, and her "noble and heroically patriotic" letter moved the Grand Army of the Republic men of Sacramento to send her a gold medal.¹⁶ Thus, there was a precedent for restoring objects of sentimental value to their "rightful owners," as the first letter to the Goldsboro Rifles declared. The use of this phrase is, in itself, significant in the context of national reconciliation, since there seems to have been no impulse to return objects taken in the wars against Great Britain and Mexico.

Of all the factors that influenced the Twenty-Seventh veterans, the most compelling was undoubtedly the fact that the regiment had its own experience of seeing a cherished flag captured and returned. It is this circumstance that closes the circle of romance in the history of the Twenty-Seventh, in a style that would delight a nineteenth century novelist. Early in the war, as noted, the newly-organized regiment was presented with a set of national and state colors. These were provided by the state government, as was standard procedure at the time. Exhorting the untried regiment assembled before him, the assistant commissary-general of Massachusetts turned over custody of the flags, saying: "Though they be stained with human gore, riddled by weapons of destruction hurled by an infuriated foe, or faded by the lapse of time, bring them back unblemished--bring them back a crown of glory for your brow."¹⁷

After the Battle of New Bern, the Twenty-Seventh, having participated in one of the few events that had given the North reason to cheer, was lionized. On March 24, 1862, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a resolution thanking the state's regiments "for their heroic deeds at the battle."¹⁸ Caught up in the spirit of the occasion, the women of Springfield made the regiment a new flag, at a cost of one hundred dollars. It was described as "a flag of blue, bearing the Massachusetts coat of arms on a silken fabric."¹⁹ At the time Colonel Luke Lyman and

16. Springfield Republican, December 12, 1882.

17. Springfield Republican, March 19, 1886. The speech was made on October 18, 1861.

18. Derby, Bearing Arms, p. 93.

19. Springfield Republican, March 19, 1886.

Lieutenant John W. Trafton of the Twenty-Seventh were in Springfield on furlough, and were given the flag to present to the regiment, then still encamped near New Bern. In a solemn ceremony on June 2, 1862, the "ladies' flag" was given to the regiment for safekeeping. The two original flags were still reasonably intact, so the new one was simply added to the unit's array.

Nearly two years later, the regiment carried the flags into battle as part of General Benjamin F. Butler's Army of the James. Butler's bungled campaign might have passed into history as a comic episode, until a pitched battle at Drewry's Bluff, southeast of Richmond, on May 16, 1864, threatened it with disaster. Hard defensive fighting by the federals and a dense fog thwarted Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard's plan to destroy Butler's army, but the Twenty-Seventh was cut off and surrounded on the extreme right of the Union line. Color-bearer Alvin A. Gage of Monson, Massachusetts, tried to tear the flag from its standard to hide it, but a rebel officer held a pistol to his head and warned: "Tear another thread and I'll blow your brains out." Along with the flag, a large portion of the regiment was taken into captivity; few of them thought they would ever again see their beloved banner.

After the war, the Confederate archives, including trophies of war, were taken to Washington and put in a War Department repository. In 1880 a member of the Twenty-Seventh from Northampton discovered in that collection the regiment's two original flags. Through the intervention of local Congressman George D. Robinson, the "ladies' flag" was located after a difficult search, and all three were returned to the regimental association in a ceremony on Washington's Birthday, 1881. Seldom had the old Springfield Music Hall witnessed a more emotional occasion. Color-bearer Gage once again waved the flag, for the first time since 1864, and Chaplain C. L. Woodworth, who had given an "eloquent and vigorous address" when the "ladies' flag" was presented in the camp near New Bern, performed a similar office. When Colonel Horace C. Lee, organizer and commander of the regiment, appeared, the cheering was so lusty that he murmured: "Not too much of that, boys, or I shan't be able to say anything." Later the men rose to sing "The Battle Cry of Freedom," and when they came to the line "Yes, we'll rally 'round the flag, boys," they

needed no explanation of its significance.²⁰ In September of 1882, the regimental reunion was held in Athol, which had contributed one company, and the restored flags were again unfurled and cheered.²¹

In a striking historical parallel, the Goldsboro Rifles felt the same sentimental attachment to their flag, and for the same reasons. Their flag, too, was a "ladies' flag," made and presented "By the Young Ladies of Wayne Female College," and so inscribed. According to tradition, the women were so eager to take part that each was allowed to contribute only a single letter.²² It is said that a northern lady who was a teacher at the academy even participated.²³ The flag was presented to the company at a ceremony in front of the courthouse, in those stirring, gallant, innocent days of April, 1861. The other slogan embroidered on the flag, "Victory or Death," testified to the intense patriotism of the time, but proved somewhat embarrassing when the emblem was captured in camp, where neither of the extreme alternatives was available. The Rifles were an independent company formed during the deepening sectional discord that preceded the war -- prophetically on October 1, 1859, the beginning of the month in which John Brown launched his attack on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia.²⁴ When adopted into the Confederate service, the company was given a place of honor, being designated as Company A of the Twenty-Seventh North Carolina.

Once the impulse to return flags had arisen, another fortuitous circumstance seems to have influenced the outcome. Traveling to the state encampment, the Goldsboro Rifles were involved in a railroad accident near Asheville, North Carolina, on July 22, 1885, in which twenty-two of the men were injured. This incident was widely reported, and may have called the attention of the veterans of the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts to the continued existence of the Goldsboro Rifles. Remarks by a

20. Springfield Republican, February 22 and 23, 1881, and March 19, 1886.

21. Springfield Republican, September 21, 1882.

22. Springfield Republican, March 18, 1886.

23. Goldsboro Messenger, March 18, 1886.

24. Springfield Republican, March 18, 1886.

member of that company at the ceremony returning the flag make it clear that the North Carolinians believed that to be the case. General Henry C. Dwight, representing Massachusetts on that occasion, seemed to confirm the supposition, observing that "Last September [1885] at our reunion it came to our knowledge that the Goldsboro Rifles were still in existence."²⁵ Supporting this contention, it is noteworthy that the initial letter from the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts to Goldsboro was dated August 3, 1885 -- less than two weeks after the railroad accident. This may explain why, although Peter S. Bailey seems to have originated the idea of returning flags with regard to his Haw River flag, interest was soon diverted to the Goldsboro banner, and the Haw River was forgotten.

During the winter of 1885-1886, the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts was absorbed in enthusiastic preparations to return the Goldsboro flag. In December, the flag was exhibited at a week-long Grand Army of the Republic fair at Westfield, probably the last time it was publicly displayed in Massachusetts.²⁶ The association had also decided to include a contemporary United States flag in the presentation, and it ordered two from the famous Cheney Brothers silk works in South Manchester, Connecticut (The second was kept in Northampton, and in recent years contributed to the confusion surrounding the flag issue). During this period, the sensitive question of who would represent the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts was also resolved. The earlier suggestion that regimental historian W. P. Derby should accompany the flag was not carried out, and the assignment went instead to Henry C. Dwight, a captain in the Twenty-Seventh who was later promoted to general. There was considerable logic to this choice, since Dwight, a descendant of one of the Northampton "River God" families, was then president of the regimental association. A successful businessman and later mayor of Hartford, Connecticut, Dwight was probably the most prominent member of the old Twenty-Seventh, and also the best able to afford the trip -- contemporary reports did not establish whether the journey was paid for by private or association funds.

25. Goldsboro Messenger, March 22, 1886.

26. Springfield Republican, December 12, 13, and 23, 1885.

Dwight was joined by Captain Edward L. Peck of Westfield, who then represented Company F, his former command, on the association's executive committee. Peck had reached Goldsboro from the opposite direction of Dwight, for he had been spending the winter in Tampa, Florida, with Colonel Walter G. Bartholomew, another distinguished member of the Twenty-Seventh. It is possible to speculate that because of these ties, men like Peck and Bartholomew felt more sympathy toward the South than less-traveled members of the regiment. Peck noted in a letter that he arrived in Goldsboro twenty-four years to the day after Burnside's army had landed below New Bern.²⁷ Captain Bailey, although a member of the committee to handle the return of the flags, did not participate -- further evidence of how his Haw River flag had receded into obscurity.

After the long period of preparation, the actual return of the flag in March of 1886 was memorable, not only for its exceptional human drama, but as a striking vignette of North-South relations. The recovery of what the local editor described as "this treasured banner, whose silken folds floated triumphantly over the heads of our brave boys when they responded to the impulses of patriotism," inspired an outpouring of oratory and celebration.²⁸ During their stay in North Carolina, the Massachusetts emissaries, Dwight and Peck, were treated royally, and the whole occasion took on the appearance of a "love feast."

On Thursday, March 18, 1886 -- only a few days after the twenty-fourth anniversary of the flag's capture -- more than 1,300 people (in a town with a population of about 5,000) packed the Goldsboro opera house to witness the homecoming of the flags. Standing on a stage draped with banners and lined with aging men in Confederate uniforms, along with younger members of the Goldsboro Rifles, Dwight "was received with rapturous applause and ever and anon throughout his address the expressions of good will towards the gallant men who opposed him on the battle-field, and towards the people of the South, elicited hearty

27. Springfield Republican, March 18, 1886. Although considered in frail health in 1886, Bartholomew outlived Peck and was present at the fiftieth anniversary of the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts, in 1911, one of only two surviving officers.

28. Goldsboro Messenger, March 18, 1886.

appreciation at the hands of the audience."²⁹ At the close of Dwight's speech, the southern veterans "gave vent to their feelings of joy in a grand old REBEL YELL -- the same yell which twenty-five years ago struck terror oftentimes to the boys in blue and inspired with deeper courage the boys in grey."³⁰

Following the formal transfer of the flag, Captain Swift Galloway, "a battle-scarred confederate" and solicitor of the district, delivered the main address on behalf of the North Carolinians. Described as "full six feet four, with gigantic frame and splendid physique, though showing the ravages of hard service," Galloway paid effusive tribute to the spirit of peace and harmony symbolized by the return of the flag. The ensign, he said, "was captured by foes in the midst of the hot breath of war. In the soft air of blessed peace it proudly waves as the ransom of hearts reunited--the signal of restored brotherhood."³¹ Like the other North Carolina speakers and commentators, Galloway soothed southern sensibilities by stressing that the flag had not been captured in actual combat.

After a few cordial remarks by Captain Peck, General Dwight stepped to the front of the stage and, announcing that he had another pleasant duty to perform. At that point he unfurled and gave to Captain Hallowell the new national flag, inscribed "GOLDSBORO RIFLES -- PRESENTED BY THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MASS. REGIMENT." This gesture was apparently as complete a surprise as the Massachusetts men could have wished, and it elicited deafening applause. In the florid style cultivated by many editors, the *Goldsboro Messenger* gushed: "This beautiful scene of peace, friendship and brotherly love . . . was a scene to awaken in stubborn hearts the emotions of kindness and affection -- a scene to melt to tears the sympathetic nature -- a scene such as angels love to dwell upon and makes Paradise vocal with the glad hallelujah, 'Peace upon earth and good will towards men.'"

The whole episode provides a marvelous capsule of the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War. The former Confederacy returned to full, voluntary membership in the Union

29. Goldsboro Messenger, March 22, 1886.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Springfield Republican, March 23, 1886.

and gave up slavery, but it was allowed to resolve its social issues without interference from the North. Regardless of which side they had fought on a quarter of a century before, all the participants in the Goldsboro ceremony tacitly accepted this arrangement. They dwelled upon the "new bond of love between us and the section against which we fought," in Galloway's flowery words, and no one raised any disturbing questions or revived troublesome memories. Inflammatory terms like "treason" or "rebellion" were avoided; under the unspoken mutual agreement it was conceded that the South had gone to war for "principle." So, indeed, had the North, but the old arguments over these principles had lost their potency and, like the wartime dead, they rested in peace. The rebel yells and the playing of "Dixie" which greeted Dwight's train were regarded as colorful folkways, no longer threatening. On the day following the flag presentation and a lavish banquet, the delegates of the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts were escorted by J.A. Bonitz, editor of the *Goldsboro Messenger*, to tour a nearby "colored" insane asylum. This recently-established state institution was conceded by the *Springfield Republican* (presumably based on information provided by Dwight and Peck) to "compare favorably with any of like character in the North."³² Thus everyone present appeared content with the shared fictions that seemed to bring an end to the sectional strife which had bedeviled the nation through much of its history.

One disruptive element disturbed the prevailing harmony, but only from a distance. Shortly after the Goldsboro ceremony, the editor of the *Holyoke Transcript* expressed his disapproval of the proceedings in terms of uncompromising vehemence:

It seems decidedly unpatriotic to return to traitors their emblems of treason. The rebellion of the slave-holders was treason in its most horrible form and was attended by the killing by bullets, starvation and disease of thousands of loyal men and the traitors are not worthy of the return of their traitorous colors. When the banquet was at its height the chairman should have given as a toast

32. Ibid.

"Andersonville" and should have called upon the northern ex-soldiers to have responded The traitor's flag had better been burned to ashes than to be borne back to them to be kept by them as a precious relic of their days of treason.

Concluding with an allusion to the childhood rhyme about Guy Fawkes, the editorial declared "Treason should not be forgiven or forgot."³³

In Goldsboro, this blast shattered the calm surface like a siren amidst a chorus of hosannas. Responding under the headline "Insult Hurlled Back; A Bloody Shirt Editor Rebuked," the *Messenger*, which printed the Holyoke diatribe in full, proclaimed it the work of the kind of man who in wartime had been called a "bummer." In language reminiscent of the prewar southern fire-eaters, though on a somewhat altered theme, the *Messenger* asserted:

I am lothe[sic] to believe that public opinion in Massachusetts is so debased, mean and malignant as the editorial would indicate. Twenty-five years after the war is over, when good men of all parties are united in a common effort to bind up the bleeding wounds and memories of the war, an editor can be found in the State of Massachusetts so vile, so low, that upon any and every effort to restore good feeling and community of interest between the sections, he can only smear his slime and intrude his loathsome and debased sentiments upon the good sense, manliness and kindly feeling of the country.

Leaving aside the extreme rhetoric, the North Carolina editor's underlying perception probably had merit. While no one was ready to forget the war and its sacrifices, opinions such as those in the Holyoke paper were expressed by a dwindling minority and had become something of an embarrassment. More than anything else, the exchange showed how inappropriate the

33. Holyoke Transcript, March 20, 1886.

sentiments of conventional wartime ferocity had become twenty years later. While probably having no special significance at the time, the fact that none of the companies composing the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts had been raised in Holyoke may have proved fortuitous in removing a potential restraint on the editor.

Nevertheless, the gesture of the Twenty-seventh was ahead of its time, and any trend it set was a delayed one. This was demonstrated in the following year, when President Grover Cleveland's executive order authorizing the return of captured rebel flags provoked a tempest among veterans' groups in the North.³⁴ While much of this furor was partisan in nature, it showed that there was still a reservoir of sentiment capable of being stirred. In time, however, the impulse to which the Twenty-seventh contributed gained momentum, climaxing in the uncontroversial congressional resolution of 1905. In 1892, for example, the Ninth Massachusetts duplicated the act of the Twenty-seventh by returning a flag to Shelby, North Carolina.³⁵ Similarly, visits to battlefields and contacts between the former opponents increased, culminating in the gnarled handclasps of men who had lived beyond their time at the Seventy-fifth anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg in 1938. At times, the veterans seemed to have a deeper kinship with their erstwhile foes than with neighbors who had not passed through the crucible of war. This feeling was given vivid expression in 1910, when a contingent of Confederate veterans spent several days in Springfield as honored guests of local veterans' groups who had once faced them in mortal combat.

In the enthusiasm of the 1886 occasion, the *Messenger* had declared that the flag ceremony was "a scene never to be effaced from the pleasant recollections of memory's tablet," and it may be true that the memory endured as long as witnesses survived. But as those with personal recall passed from the scene, the editor's vow that the flag would be "ever preserved as a priceless treasure" proved more difficult to maintain. March 18, 1886, had been a brilliant affair, but as the gala lights dimmed, twilight shadows of uncertainty appeared. Apparently

34. John M. Taylor, "Grover Cleveland's Little Blunder," *Old Farmer's Almanac*, 1987, pp. 98-100.

35. *Springfield Republican*, September 24, 1892.

unaccompanied by documentation such as plaques or certificates, the flags were left to provide the only testimony about their origins.

As the years passed, the history of the flags faded with the flags themselves, and confusion deepened. The deteriorating condition of the flags, mostly made of silk or cotton, compounded the problems. In 1886 it was still possible to speak of "unfurling" the Goldsboro flag, indicating that it was physically intact. Even the banners of the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts, torn in battle, retained sufficient physical integrity to be hung and displayed. A century later the physical condition of the flags had decayed along with their emotional impact, and they had become subjects for restoration in both the material and intellectual sense.

After their long decades in obscurity, the flags received renewed attention in 1985, when a committee was organized to rededicate Springfield's Civil War monument. Installed one hundred years earlier, the monument was in good physical condition but its significance was largely unappreciated. In the course of arranging the event, the organizers attempted to find the flags of the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts, which had been placed in the City Library by resolution of the regimental association after their return in 1881. They were known to be in the library as late as 1908.³⁶ However in 1985, the flags were nowhere to be found; all that remained was a cryptic note in the library files. Dated 1960, it stated that the Twenty-seventh "Battalion [sic]" were "among flags at Connecticut Valley Historical Society disposed of ten years ago - some to Springfield Armory for burning because of poor condition and some to West Point - no further information available." This entry raised numerous questions. Neither of the other institutions had any record of the flags, but since no other evidence has surfaced, it remains all we have to go on.

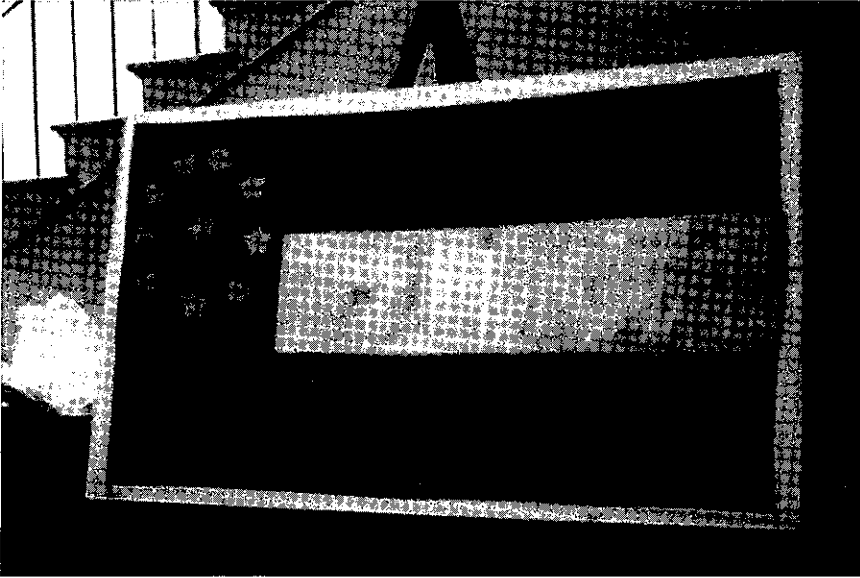
During the unsuccessful search for the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts flags, an unidentified flag was found in the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum. It had apparently come into the museum around 1940, with no record of its origin. Closer study by Civil War experts eventually revealed that it was the flag captured at Roanoke Island. This discovery began the chain of

36. Springfield Republican, August 26, 1908.

events that culminated in the restoration of the flag to North Carolina in November of 1988. Contact with North Carolina historical organizations, in turn, reawakened interest in the Goldsboro Rifles' flag, whose story had been forgotten in Massachusetts. The Civil War enthusiasts who were preparing the rededication were struck by the portentous coincidence of finding that the event they were commemorating very nearly marked the centennial of the Goldsboro ceremony. The Goldsboro flag still survived, but some confusion had arisen about the inscription, possibly because some of the embroidered letters had become detached.

The renewed interest in flags in North Carolina produced additional complications. The national flag that had been presented by the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts in 1886 was, in a sense, rediscovered, but under circumstances that only added to the confusion. Because the middle line of the inscription, containing the words "Presented by" was missing, while the portion reading "Twenty-seventh Mass." remained, it was mistakenly assumed that they had a captured flag. There was even a proposal to restore the flag to Massachusetts as an expression of gratitude for the return of the Roanoke Island flag. The failure to notice that the thirty-seven stars precluded the possibility of the flag's dating to the Civil War might have been excusable, because only two new states (Nebraska and Colorado) had entered the Union between the end of the war and 1886. Still further complications arose when the duplicate of this flag was found in Memorial Hall, Northampton. This flag, with the inscription relating it to Goldsboro, was still physically intact, but there was no longer any record or tradition to explain why it was there. Meanwhile, the Haw River flag dropped out of sight and has not been mentioned in more than a century. If it should reappear, yet another chapter might be added to the flag-draped saga of the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts.

The documentary record had become as tattered as the flags themselves. Most regrettably, the records of the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts regimental association could not be found. Given the level of activity and organization of this group, the records must have been both extensive and meticulous. Another unfortunate loss concerns the papers of Captain Edwin L. Peck, who had been one of the delegates to Goldsboro. Peck died at Westfield on March 14, 1898; only fifty-nine years old, his health



**Flag presented to North Carolina by the Connecticut Valley
Historical Museum**

had probably been impaired by a period of wartime captivity. It was said that he had collected many war relics, and a later article noted that "he left among his effects a scrap-book containing clippings from southern and northern newspapers giving accounts in detail of the incidents of the return of the flag."³⁷ It would

37. Springfield Republican, March 15, 1898; April 2, 1905.

seem likely that either the association records or Peck's material might provide a more conclusive answer to the fundamental question of what motivated the veterans of the Twenty-seventh to make their bold gesture of reconciliation.

One of the purposes of this article, in addition to recalling and clarifying the remarkable story of the flags, is to call attention to the gaps in the historical records. There is always hope that individuals or institutions will realize the significance of previously obscure objects or documents in their possession, so that some of the gaps in the historical record can be filled. The flags themselves will never be unfurled over large bodies of uniformed men, but they can once again symbolize the dedication and fortitude of those men.

Summary of Flags Mentioned in This Article

1. Flag presumed to belong to commanding officer of 2nd North Carolina Bn., captured by Twenty-seventh Massachusetts at Roanoke Island, February 8, 1862; Returned to North Carolina November 19, 1988. - In the collection of the North Carolina Museum of History
2. National flag presented to Twenty-seventh Massachusetts in camp at Springfield October 18, 1861; captured at Drewry's Bluff, Virginia, May 16, 1864; returned to regiment February 22, 1881. - Location unknown
3. State flag presented to Twenty-seventh Massachusetts, same history as #2. - Location unknown
4. Flag of Goldsboro Rifles (Co. A., 27th N.C.); captured by Twenty-seventh Massachusetts at New Bern, March 14, 1862; returned to Goldsboro March 18, 1886.
5. Flag of "Haw River Boys" (Co. D, 35th N.C.); captured by Twenty-seventh Massachusetts at New Bern, March 14, 1862. - Location unknown
6. "Ladies' flag" presented to Twenty-seventh Massachusetts June 2, 1862; subsequent history same as #2. - Location unknown
7. National flag produced for Twenty-seventh Massachusetts regimental association 1885; presented to Goldsboro Rifles March 18, 1886.
8. Duplicate of #7. - Located at Memorial Hall, Northampton, Massachusetts