



# Groups Battle Over Flag

Two historical societies want banner from Civil War

By Aaron Gifford  
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**A**lthough the vast majority of men in the Oneida Independent Company of Cavalry were from Madison County, their 1862 flag remains in Utica.

In the 1950s, a descendant of one of the cavalry members sent the flag to the Oneida County Historical Society, assuming the city of Oneida was in Oneida County, W. Robert Mayer says.

Mayer of Oneida has researched the cavalry's role in the Civil War for the past six years and is determined to have its flag permanently moved to the Madison County Historical Society museum.

He's circulated more than 30 petitions supporting his cause, in every corner of Madison County, and will ask the county Board of Supervisors to pass a resolution of support.

"It's something that we should make every effort to preserve and keep in Madison County," Mayer said last week.

## The flag

In March 1862, the flag was presented to the company by 1st Lt. James E. Jenkins of Vernon. It was a gift from the patriotic "Young Ladies" of Vernon. The 26- by 38-inch flag was carried on horseback. It resembled the U.S. flag at the time and had 34 stars and gold fringe. In Virginia, during the Peninsula Campaign, the flag was used for one day to designate Gen. George B. McClellan's headquarters. It was also present at Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender April 9, 1865, at Appomattox Court House, Va.

"All of these things become political eventually."

But the Oneida County Historical Society, which plans to restore that flag and

## The cavalry

The Oneida Independent Company of Cavalry was organized in the village of Oneida by Capt. Daniel P. Mann and left for Washington, D.C., on Sept. 6, 1861. W. Robert Mayer, who researched the company's history, said 70 percent of the men were from Madison County, but it also had members from other New York counties, including Oneida County, and even a native of the Confederate state South Carolina. The men served as escorts, bodyguards and couriers for several generals, including George B. McClellan, George Meade and Ulysses S. Grant. The company was present during the entire Peninsula Campaign and the battles of Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Mine Run, Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, North Anna, Totopotomoy Creek, Petersburg and Appomattox. None of its 49 men was killed during the Civil War. It was honorably discharged near Washington, D.C., on June 13, 1865. Its monument at Gettysburg National Military Park was dedicated in September 1904.

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## Display offer possible later

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19 others, is determined to hang on to it.

"It's not a consideration," President Kevin Marken said. "Our mission statement refers to Oneida County and the Central region. We can't just give things away. If they relate to the area, they stay in the collection."

The Oneida Independent Company of Cavalry was organized in 1861 in Oneida, then a village within the town of Lenox.

Mayer said its captain and second lieutenant were from Oneida, but its first lieutenant was from Vernon in Oneida County. Seventy percent of the men were from Madison County, he said.

The 26- by 38-inch flag was a gift from the patriotic "Young Ladies" of Vernon and carried by the company during its entire service in the Civil War.

The men served five different commanding generals of The Army of the Potomac, including Ulysses S. Grant. They worked primarily as bodyguards and couriers but also performed raids and police work.

"They made a few raids and were given a few tasks to apprehend smugglers and deserters," Mayer said, adding that none of the cavalry's 49 men was killed in the Civil War. "They were really not given credit for everything they had done."

The cavalry was at Appomattox Court House, Va., with its flag when Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered to Grant on April 9, 1865. It is also the only Central New York-based unit with a monument at Gettysburg National Military Park. Monday is the 139th anniversary of the start of the Battle at Gettysburg.

Marken said the Oneida County Historical Society would allow its Madison County counterpart to display the flag for a short time, but not until it's restored.

"It has to stay a permanent part of our collection," Marken said. "It's pretty much a part of our policy. We're trying to do what's best for the flag."

But Madison County Historical Society Executive Director Sidney Loftus said the flag should be restored and returned to Oneida, ideally in time for the county bicentennial in 2006.



# **ONEIDA INDEPENDENT COMPANY OF CAVALRY**



**Sept. 4, 1861 – June 13, 1865**

### FLAG HISTORY

In March of 1862 the flag was presented to the Company by 1st Lieutenant James E. Jenkins. It was a gift from the patriotic "Young Ladies" of Vernon, NY.

The flag was carried by the Company during its entire service.

It is 26 inches wide by 38 inches long with gold fringe and a field of 34 stars.

For one day, in Virginia, during the beginning of the Peninsula Campaign it was used to designate General McClellan's headquarters. It was returned to the Company after a larger flag was obtained.

The flag is currently stored at the Oneida County Historical Society in Utica.

It will remain there, unseen, until it can be preserved or it turns to dust.

### COMPANY HISTORY

The Oneida Independent Company of Cavalry was organized in the Village of Oneida by Captain Daniel P. Mann. It left Oneida for Washington, DC on September 6, 1861.

Most of the men in the Company were from Madison County. Some were from other counties of New York and a few, from other states. One man was a native of Charleston, South Carolina, a Confederate state.

The Company was primarily used as escorts, guards and couriers by the Commanding Generals of the Army of the Potomac. The Company served Generals McClellan, Burnside, Hooker, Meade and also Grant. In addition the Company participated in scouting, raiding and police work.

The Company was present during the entire Peninsula Campaign and the battles of Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Mine Run Campaign, Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, North Anna, Totopotomoy, Petersburg and the Appomattox Campaign.

The Company was honorably discharged and mustered out near Washington, DC on June 13, 1865.

