

## 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

# Onondaga County's role at GETTYSBURG

**O**ne hundred and fifty years ago this week, the pivotal battle of the Civil War was fought at Gettysburg, Pa. For three days, Union and Confederate forces traded withering fire and engaged in fearsome hand-to-hand combat. By the time it was over — Independence Day, July 4, 1863 — 7,863 soldiers lay dead, 27,224 were wounded and 11,199 were captured or missing.

Three Onondaga County regiments played significant roles in the battle. Their stories are told in a display at the Onondaga Historical Association, "Onondaga at Gettysburg."

The 149th New York State Volunteer Infantry defended Culp's Hill.

On the third day of the battle, the 149th received reinforcement from the 122nd New York Volunteers, who had marched 40 miles to Gettysburg. It was the only time during the war that the two Onondaga County regiments fought side by side.

Meanwhile, Battery B of the 1st New York Light Artillery pounded the Confederate line from Cemetery Hill. On the third day of the battle, after being bombarded by artillery fire, the men of Battery B witnessed 12,500 Confederate soldiers approaching their line from three-fourths of a mile away—Pickett's Charge. Battery B and its companions arrayed on the ridge unleashed their cannons. Here's how Cpl. James E. Decker described the scene in a letter to his sister Frances. The letter was published by The Post-Standard on July 7, 1963, to mark the 100th anniversary of the battle:

"When the artillery ceased, a whole division charged out of the woods. They had to cross an open field of about 100 rods to get to us. They suffered terribly getting to us but they marched up as tigers keeping perfect line until they could almost put their hands on our guns but few of them lived to get back. They were



**Col. Henry A. Barnum with the battle flag of the 149th New York Volunteer Infantry. The repair on the flag's staff made by Color Sgt. William Lilly is visible above his left arm. (Courtesy of the Onondaga Historical Association)**

killed or taken prisoners."

In the Civil War era, letters from the combatants conveyed news of the war to family and friends at home. Many were published in the local newspapers. This week, with the assistance of the Onondaga Historical Association, we'll publish a selection of Gettysburg accounts. Some come from letters to the Syracuse Journal and the Syracuse Standard, predecessors to The Post-Standard. Others are drawn from memoirs written long after the guns fell silent.