

## Repairing the regiment's flag staff



A flag staff from the Civil War is displayed at the Onondaga Historical Association In Syracuse. (Dick Blume / dblume@syracuse.com)

**A** key event in the battle for Culp's Hill at Gettysburg was the near capture of the 149th New York Volunteers' battle flag when its wood staff was shot through by enemy fire. Color Sgt. William C. Lilly repaired the staff with wood and a leather strap. The staff, its repair intact, is on display at the Onondaga Historical Association, on loan from Onondaga County. Lilly's exploit is memorialized on the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in Syracuse's Clinton Square. Multiple accounts in the OHA archives discuss the condition of the battle flag. Lilly was killed later that year at the battle of Wauhatchie, in Tennessee.

**Here is Col. H.A. Barnum's official report of the 149th Regiment at Gettysburg, published Nov. 30, 1863, in the Syracuse Journal:**

*"At about 4 a.m. of the 3d [of July], the regiment was again put in the trenches, and had barely settled into position, when the enemy again furiously attacked us. His charges were most impetuous, and his fire terrific. Twice was our flag shot down, and a rebel 1st Sergeant fell within two feet of the prostrate banner, pierced with five balls, in a brave attempt to capture it. Its record of the bloody contest is eight-one ball holes through its field and stripes, and seven in its staff. Each time it fell, Color-Sergeant Lilly spliced the staff, and again placed the flag upon the work, and received a slight wound in doing so."*

**Letter from M.S. to the Syracuse Standard, published July 9, 1863:**

"... Col. Barnum addressed our regiment in a brief and patriotic speech, while the bullets were whistling about their heads, and the roar of cannon mingled with his voice. He told them the position they were about to take they must hold at all hazards — the honor of Onondaga county and their own fair fame demanded it, and that old Salt Point must be vindicated then and there. With a cheer for the old flag they marched into their entrenchments, amid a perfect hail storm of bullets, and remained there until they left them as victors over the celebrated Stonewall Brigade, which has never before been vanquished, but is now almost annihilated. The bullet-riddled flag of the 149th bears conclusive evidence of the terrible fire to which it was exposed, and attests the persevering determination of the rebels ..."