



Old Abe  
The Civil War Eagle

## Old Abe, the War Eagle

One of the great Wisconsin symbols to come out of the Civil War was the legend of Old Abe, the war eagle. In a manner similar to the sagas of the Iron Brigade, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, the struggle of the Merrimac and Monitor, it stands out as a story which transcends the horrors of that great internal struggle.

In the spring of 1861, a band of Flambeau Indians of the Chippewa Tribe captured Old Abe as a young eagle from its nest in a tall tree near the mouth of the Jump River in Chippewa County. As the Indians moved down the Chippewa River trading their maple sugar for food, they sought to trade the young eagle; and finally Mrs. Dan McCann, who lived near the waters' edge, traded some corn for the bird.

The eagle became a family pet; and when a regiment of soldiers was being organized at Eau Claire, the eagle was offered to them as a mascot. After some hesitation, it was accepted and Old Abe was sworn into the service as a mascot. He was attached to Company C of the regiment which came to be known as the "Eagle Regiment" and Old Abe rode on a standard consisting of a shield on a pole to the left of the colors in all marches and parades and even in battle.

Old Abe was present in 42 battles and skirmishes. He would sit on his standard and scream during an engagement and was a strong factor in maintaining the morale of the regiment. The Confederates who called him the "Yankee Buzzard" sought to capture or destroy him, but they did not succeed.

On September 26, 1864, the eagle was presented by Captain Wolf of C Company to the state in a formal ceremony. Thereafter he lived in a cage in a basement room in the Capitol except when he made public appearances. Many people came to see him.

One night in February, 1881, a fire started in the Capitol basement near Old Abe's cage; and the eagle suffered from the smoke before he was rescued. After that his health declined; and on March 28, 1881, he died.

Old Abe's body was mounted and placed on exhibit in Memorial Hall in the Capitol, but when the Capitol burned in 1904, Old Abe burned with it. Replicas may still be seen in Memorial Hall and the Assembly Chamber in the Capitol.