



## Old Abe



### The Wisconsin War Eagle



The great granite effigy of an eagle atop the Wisconsin State Memorial is that of "Old Abe", the Wisconsin war eagle. The eagle was born near the headwaters of the Chippewa River in the wilds of northern Wisconsin, and was captured by a young Indian of the Lake Flambeau tribe of Chippewa during the summer of 1861. It was swapped to a Mrs. Daniel McCann for a bushel of corn, and later Mr. McCann took the young eagle to Eau Claire, where a company of soldiers was being recruited for the war. Here, a civilian, S.M. Jeffers, purchased the eagle for \$2.50 and presented it to the new "Company C" of the 8<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Regiment - the color regiment.

### Named in Honor of President Lincoln



The young eagle was named "Old Abe" in honor of President Lincoln, and as mascot of Company C, (known throughout the war and ever afterward as "The Eagle Regiment") accompanied the regiment into every battle and skirmish in which it participated. Six proud men were given the honor of being eagle bearers, the first being James McGinnis, who died on 19 September 1862 at Jackson, Tennessee. Thereafter, in order, followed Thomas J. Hill, David McLain, Edward Homiston, John Burkhardt and John F. Hill, the latter bringing the eagle home from the war and delivering Old Abe over to the state.

The eagle was carried alongside the colors, and it became attached to the flag recognizing it as his companion. Old Abe became a conspicuous figure, known alike by both Union and Confederate soldiers. He was slightly wounded during the Battle of Corinth, and following this battle someone in the regiment cropped the tail and wing feathers of the eagle to prevent his flying away. His bearer at the time, David McLain, became disgusted with this treatment of the mascot and resigned his post, passing the duty to Edward Homiston. The friendship between Homiston and Old Abe was strong, as they seemed to thoroughly understand each other.

### 25 Battles and As Many Skirmishes



In June 1864, after three years of war, a remnant of Company C arrived in Eau Claire for a well-earned rest, accompanied by Old Abe. Two months later the eagle returned to battle, with Old Abe's last engagement on 18 August 1864, at Tallahatchie River near Abbeville, Mississippi. After 25 battles and as many skirmishes, 26 members of Company C, 8<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin, were mustered out and with Old Abe, arrived in Madison, Wisconsin. There on 26 September 1864, the famous war eagle was formally presented to Governor James T. Lewis and the State of Wisconsin. Old Abe was given permanent quarters in a large room in the basement of the State Capitol Building. Everything his comfort demanded was provided and on pleasant days he sat upon a perch in the park, visited by thousands of people. From time to time

he was taken to patriotic gatherings in various parts of the country, and, in time, became more famous during peace than in the war.

One cold day in the winter of 1881, paints and oils near the eagle caught fire, filling the corridors and his cage room with dense clouds of smoke and noxious gases. He sickened from the fumes and was never again well. The following March the eagle died in the arms of his keeper, George Gillies. The eagle's body was mounted to look as natural as in life and it stood in a glass case in the capitol until 27 February 1904, when it burned in the capitol fire. Old Abe dead and mounted had seemed to attract as many visitors as when alive and there were as many mourners for him when he burned as when he had died.