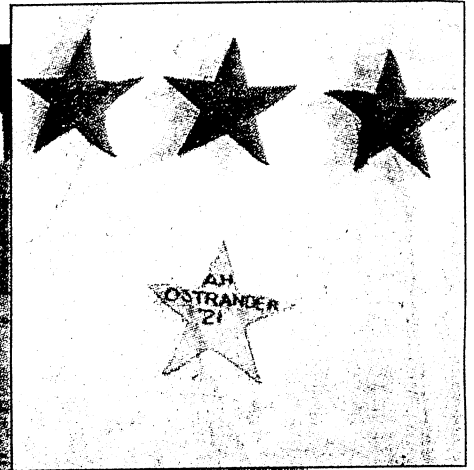
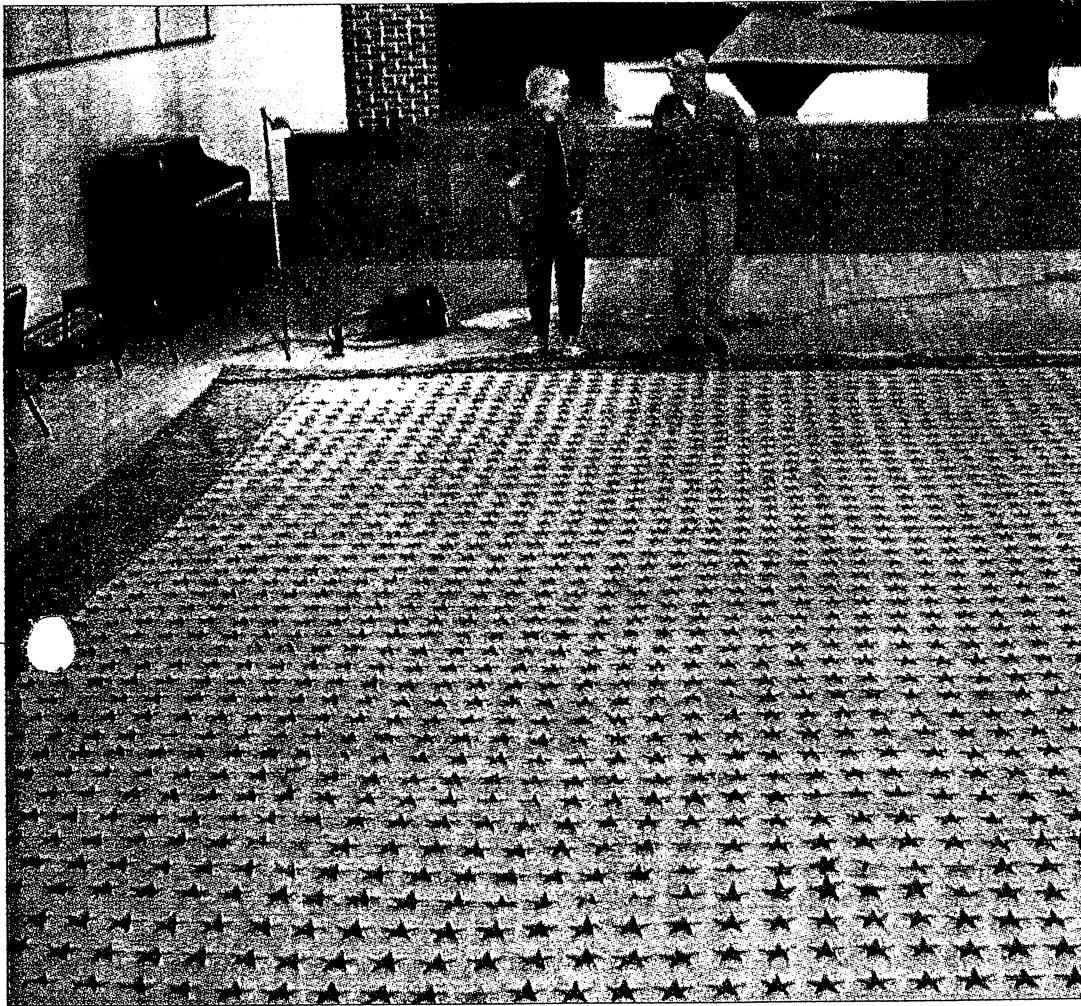


More than she bargained for



Rita Frakes, left, converses with Michael Borman of Mazomanie about her newfound, yet old-found historical artifact, a huge "Service Flag" festooned with what appears to be the names of area World War I veterans. Photo by Chris Dyer.

You never know what you might find when you open the next box....

by CHRIS DYER
News-Sickle-Arrow

Mazomanie Historical Museum Curator Rita Frakes got more than she bargained for when she opened the box marked "Service Flag."

"I had been dying to open it ever since I found it in one of our storage areas," said Frakes. "We're doing an exhibit next year on the military in peace and in war and I thought it would be a big flag we might be able

to use in the exhibit."

What she found when she opened the box was flag-like, but not actually a flag. And it was big.

Very big. "I tried to open it at the museum, but there was obviously no way that was going to work," she laughed. "So I got permission to bring it over to the Community Building, the only place in town where I could spread it out."

Carefully unfolding the fragile, but generally well-preserved, fabric, Frakes discovered a huge banner bear-

ing literally thousands of blue felt stars—plus a few gold ones—sewn onto a white background and surrounded by a wide, red border. On each star was a hand embroidered name and a date. The dates were from '16 to '21, with the majority falling into the '17 to '19 range, and many of the names were of Mazomanie area families. Along the bottom edge of the banner was the number 12500 in large block letters.

Frakes readily admitted that she knows nothing for sure about the ban-

ner, but it has clearly tweaked her curatorial curiosity.

"Because of the stars and the dates, I believe it's related somehow to World War I era servicemen," she said. "At first I thought it might be just Mazomanie area veterans, but there are something like 2500 stars here, far too many for it to be just Mazomanie. I think it probably has to do with all of Dane County, at least."

Frakes noted that the embroidery

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exhibited a number of different stitches and that the stars were attached to the backing with both hand and machine stitching, probably indicating a group effort. It was also apparent, she pointed out, that the stars had first been sewn on strips of white cloth which were then assembled with commercial grade sewing machines, perhaps at a flag making company. Professional help would also have been required for the border and for the heavy canvas hanging loops along the banner's top and bottom edges. All in all, Frakes said, it must have been a major project intended for some kind of public display or event; the kind of thing you would expect to be recorded, or at least remembered, in a town the size of Mazomanie.

Several village residents stopped by the Community Building on Tuesday morning to have a look at the banner as Frakes examined it.

"I'm a little too young to remember

it," said Frank Wolf, "but if it's Dane County WW I veterans, my father's name should be on it somewhere. He volunteered in 1917 and did his training at Camp Randall."

Wolf also reported that he had checked some names from the banner against those of WW I veterans in the St. Barnabas cemetery and found no matches.

The only positive note came from Margaret O'Hara, who was pretty sure the "R. O'Hara" on a blue star near the lower left corner of the banner referred to her uncle Ray. The date was right, she said, for when he was in the army, and the misspelled name was an everyday event for members of the O'Hara clan. "That's our first real clue," Frakes said. "We've really got to find out its story. I hope anyone who knows anything about it will give me a call."

Anyone with knowledge about the Mazomanie "Service Flag" is encour-

(The NSA
left off
the last
sentence!)

Sita Frakes, museum 795-2992; home 795-4355