

# War ends, collectors win

By KATIE KERWIN

Ray Russell of Rochester felt right at home with the convention of Civil War buffs who gathered at the Troy Hilton last weekend.

His interest in Civil War history sprang from stories he heard in his youth, down at Rochester's general store, from local Civil War veterans.

Russell was one of about 100 Civil War historians and collectors displaying memorabilia at the Great Lakes Civil War Show, Sept. 8-9 in Troy.

Enthusiasts rambled through the aisles of exhibits, comparing notes and admiring one another's collections. Local Civil War devotees and interested families also explored the display hall. This is the largest gathering of original Civil War equipment in this state since the Michigan volunteers left for Virgin-

ia in 1861," said Jim Brady, one of the event's organizers. He pointed out notable items on display, including a Matthew Brady photograph taken at Gettysburg shortly after the battle and swords and pistols carried into battle by important officers.

Uniforms, drums, diaries, photographs, medals and personal equipment of Confederate and Union soldiers were also exhibited.

However one famous memento targeted for the display was missing. Abraham Lincoln's walking cane, carried to Ford's Theatre the night he was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, could not be exhibited as planned, Brady said. The \$250,000 insurance policy on the cane does not allow it to be removed from its Tennessee museum, exhibitors recently discovered.

RUSSELL, 66, like many exhibitors at the Great Lakes show, has a lifelong interest in Civil War events. Since his retirement from the Rochester police six years ago, he has operated a bookstore on Fourth, specializing in war and military books.

He brought many of his acquisitions to his display at the Hilton, including a logbook filled with spidery handwriting — the minutes of reunion meetings of the Rochester veterans.

He pointed out a flag carried by the Rochester unit. An adjacent daguerreotype shows the oldtimers gathered around the flag in town after the war. Russell said he can't quite put his finger on the reason for his near-60-year fascination with the Civil War era. "I guess I believe, down in me, in romance," he said, with a smile.

DISCOVERING PERSONAL stories behind the items he collects is the most interesting aspect of his hobby, said W. Wiley Sward, of Birmingham.

"It adds a new dimension to collecting," he said. "You can get into the personal history of the man, the soldier who carried a particular weapon."

Sward collects a variety of historical pieces, including a number of weapons used in the Battle of Gettysburg. The search often begins with an inscription on a pistol or sword. The fragment of history that unwinds may give him a different perspective on events of the times, Sward said. He picked up a pistol that belonged to a Swiss sharpshooter who joined Union forces shortly after migrating to the U.S. The new citizen was killed in battle. His wife

died soon after of disease, leaving their two children orphans. Sward recounted. "It's in researching stories like that that I become more appreciative of what went into the making of this country and of the sacrifices that were necessary," he said.

Sward also pointed out a sword with a decorated and engraved hilt. "That belonged to one of the few Gettysburg survivors from Michigan," he said. The officer distinguished himself in that battle by rescuing a wounded fellow-officer from the battlefield.

The Michigan man's luck ran out soon after, though. He was one of the casualties of a later battle, Sward said. His sword was returned to his family by the officer he had rescued at Gettysburg. Such ironies abound in the stories he has researched, the Birmingham exhibitor said.

Thursday, September 13, 1979

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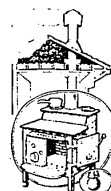
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