

Rare Civil War garment on display at Civil War Museum

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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May 5, 2011
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Kenosha – A Civil War frock coat worn by Corp. Milton Ewen of Company I, the First Wisconsin Infantry (90 Day Volunteers) recently went on display at the Civil War Museum. The coat is on loan from the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison. This was the same regiment that the Park City Grays of Kenosha joined right after the Civil War started in April, 1861. There are only four gray coats known to exist from the First Wisconsin and they are rarely exhibited.

The Civil War Museum focuses on the role of six Upper Middle West states (Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan) and tells the personal stories of men, women and children before, during and after the Civil War. The frock coat is on display through October in the museum's main exhibit, the Fiery Trial, which takes visitors back in history through state-of-the-art technology and interactive exhibits.

After the April 14, 1861, surrender of Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 troops to serve for three months to put down the rebellion. Lincoln asked Wisconsin Governor Alexander Randall to fill a quota of one regiment consisting of ten companies of seventy-eight men, plus officers.

Corporal Milton Ewen answered Wisconsin's call for soldiers by signing the muster roll of Co. I, 1st Wisconsin in Fond du Lac on April 20, 1861. He was a 23 year old merchant who stood 5' 7" tall, with black hair and hazel eyes. He served with the 1st during its three month term, mustering out with the regiment on August 21, 1861.

To clothe the early regiments, Governor Randall purchased gray material from eastern merchants and assembled the uniforms in Wisconsin. Thus, the 1st Wisconsin left for the battlefield wearing gray uniforms, as did the first eight volunteer regiments from the state. One member of Co. I commented on these early uniforms saying, "We have at last received our clothes, which they call uniforms, although one would think, to see the company on parade, that the tailor had several styles of Joseph's (Joseph of the multi-colored dream coat) coat's to pattern after, and warranted each uniform 'to fit the smallest boy or largest man.' The cloth is gray, of various shades. Much of it is poor quality and will not stand hard service. The pants have a black cord down the sides, the coats have brass buttons and standing collars." After mustering out of the 1st, Ewen joined Co. F, 21st Wisconsin, as a First Lieutenant. He received a wound at the Battle of Perryville on October 8, 1862, recovered, and was promoted to captain in February 1863. Later that year, Ewen was captured and sent to Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia. He survived further imprisonment in Charleston and Columbia, South Carolina, and mustered out of the Union army in April 1865.

After the war, Ewen returned to the Midwest where he died in Saginaw, Michigan, on February 1, 1911. He is buried in Rienzi Cemetery in Fond du Lac.