



Varnum Continentals, Inc
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Subject: Bristol Flag Update

April 12, 2026

Dear Members of the Bristol Town Council,

We have been asked to provide an update/status report on the 7 flags that were put on long term loan to the Varnum Armory Museum located at 6 Main St, East Greenwich, RI back in early 2020. **There has really been no change in status since the last condition report was filed.**

For those on the Council who may not be aware of this flag conservation and loan project. Let me summarize that here. Back in the Summer of 2020, we were contacted by then Town Clerk, Lou Cirillo, to help identify a group of old flags that had been stored (wrapped around their poles, covered in plastic and taped shut) in the old Town Annex building (Burnside Memorial) presumably left in that way since the 1976 bi-centennial. The flags were in very poor condition. We made an offer to the Town Council to move the flags to the Varnum Armory's textile conservation lab for evaluation and possible conservation – all at our expense. The Council unanimously agreed to this proposal and for us to have them on long term loan for display/storage in our secure, climate and light-controlled museum rooms.

Only 3 of the 7 flags were in decent condition. The remaining 4 were in varying degrees of bad decay, in some cases literally turning to dust. Thankfully, those 4 flags do not have great significance from a historical or financial perspective with most being standard US flags of the late 19th century.

Today, 2 of the flags are on display in our museum. Here is the status of the flags:

1. The 1695 "Nathaniel Byfield" flag carried by the Bristol County militia. This flag was beautifully and painstakingly conserved by our Vice President, Maria Vazquez who holds a Master's degree in Textile Conservation from URI. The conservation was covered in a RI PBS documentary titled, A Stitch in Time. The flag is prominently on display in our Colonial RI exhibit room. It is lying flat in a custom-made glass display table. The room, like all our exhibit gallery rooms, has security controls (locks, alarms, video surveillance, motion detectors) and is climate and light controlled. **ACTION: Happy to support a loan to Bristol. Bristol needs to provide a safe environment for it to be displayed in.**
2. A Civil War veteran banner for Babbit Post 15 that used to meet in the Burnside Memorial Building. This small banner was in pieces and crushed. Maria was able to make it beautiful and displayable once again.

3. There's a 2nd Babbit Post 15 banner (exactly the same as above) that was also conserved and mounted for display. **ACTION: We recommend transferring this flag to either the Town Hall or to the Bristol Historical Society for a long-term display.**
4. 33-star US flag carried by Co. G, 2nd RI Volunteers: only about 1/3 of this flag remains with the rest in pieces and dust. Given its Civil War history, this is worth conserving the remains for display. We still would like to do this, but it is behind other conservation projects in our queue. It is in safe archival storage at present. **ACTION: Remain at Varnum Armory Museum in storage for eventual conservation and display.**
5. US Navy Jack ensign flag...this wool bunting flag is in good shape and has been safely rolled in archival materials for storage in our conservation lab. This is a standard, common flag from the late 1800s or early 1900s. **ACTION: We would be happy to transfer this flag to Bristol Historical Society if they are interested.**
6. The remaining two flags are standard US flags from the late 1800s and were likely used with the Grand Army of the Republic "Babbit Post 15" CW veterans. These are in extremely poor condition. We put them in archival boxes for storage. We have no plans to attempt any conservation. From an historical and financial perspective, they are not worth the effort, I'm afraid.

Thanks, and best regards,

Patrick Donovan, President Varnum Continentals, Inc & Executive Director Varnum Armory Museum