Have you considered hosting a reenactment at your historic site? This resource packet will introduce you to reenacting, how the hobby is organized, how to communicate with reenactor groups, and the logistics of hosting a reenactment. It also includes a glossary of common reenacting terms (bolded in the text), sample reenactment guidelines and contracts, and several useful articles by reenactors and historic site managers about the interpretive potential and logistical management of reenactments.
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(A: Sample Contracts and Guidelines; B: Bibliography and Resource Articles)
Reenacting is a hobby in which individuals wear historical clothing and recreate events and activities from the past. For many reenactors, it is their main hobby, and they spend considerable sums and a large amount of their free time researching history, acquiring materials, and participating in reenactments. A reenactor’s goal is to develop an impression, where his or her combination of clothing, equipment, and knowledge represents a particular moment in history. Many reenactors have multiple impressions. One hobbyist might portray on different occasions, for example, a Roman legionnaire, a Gold Rush prospector, and a World War One doughboy. Or another might portray a Revolutionary War camp follower, a Civil War widow, and a woman from the 1890s. Reenactors include whole families and individuals of all ages. In the United States, the most common time period for reenacting is the Civil War, but there are also substantial communities of reenactors of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, World War One, and World War Two, as well as many other wars and civilian events in between.
What is a reenactment?

Reenactments at historic sites and on private land feature things such as encampments, mock battles, dances, vendors, and craft demonstrations. In reenactor jargon, an event refers to any sort of reenactment activity. Here are some examples, all of which might take place on a single day or over a whole weekend (the latter is more common):

• A living history event is one focused on interpreting non-battle activities, such as a weekend where reenactors occupy a historic fort and perform military chores and drills, or one where a group of costumed men and women cook, clean, and sew in a historic house.
• A timeline event includes reenactors portraying multiple time periods in separate camps or spaces within a historic site or property.
• A private event is held for reenactors only (for fun), without spectators, usually on private land.
• A battle reenactment commemorates a particular battle or a war in general. Battle reenactments usually draw more visitors than other types of reenactments. Some sites, including those of the National Park Service, avoid recreating combat and instead use costumed interpreters to demonstrate military drill, historical trades, and other aspects of the past.

What sort of programming you offer should be developed in conversation with your reenactors to avoid overscheduling and to maximize reenactors’ contributions to your site’s goals. Most reenactment groups will be happy to help you develop a reenactment, but they will need to hear from you well in advance of your planned dates. Reenactors usually set their event schedules in the first months of the year.

Recommended Reading

Reenacting vs. Living History

Some reenactors prefer the term living historian as a way of distinguishing themselves – as dedicated researchers and interpreters of history – from the negative stereotypes sometimes associated with reenactors (as, for example, casual hobbyists or inauthentic farbs). In the strictest sense, a reenactor is a hobbyist and a living historian is a professional or volunteer interpreter working at a historic site who wears historical clothing and engages in living history interpretation. Staff members at Colonial Williamsburg or Old Sturbridge Village, for example, are living historians, not reenactors. Both reenactors and living historians may engage spectators and other reenactors in first-person interpretation, where they pretend to be a person from the past, or third-person interpretation, where they speak as a modern person while wearing historical clothing and engaging in historical tasks. Clarifying which method volunteer reenactors and living historians will use during an event is an important step in integrating them into your site’s interpretive goals.

Recommended Reading

The Association for Living History, Farm, and Agricultural Museums (www.alhfam.org) is the national organization that supports living history museum interpretation, including with conferences and publications. For a non-reenactor museum professional’s take on the value of living history, see Nicole’s Belolan’s appended article: “We Will All Be Phony Colonies.” ALHFAM Bulletin 45, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 25–27.
When you host reenactors who will be interacting with the public, you release what is called interpretive authority to them. It is important to keep in mind that most reenactors have little or no formal interpretive training (although they often have substantial interpretive experience). As a result, they may introduce interpretive ideas and arguments that diverge from your site’s official narratives. For example, Civil War reenactors are often very knowledgeable, and they hold a variety of opinions about the origins and outcomes of the Civil War. This makes it important to clarify some of your site’s interpretive policies (see page 6) and to monitor reenactor programming. Because public interpretation is the ultimate goal of your site hosting a reenactment, you should search out reenactors who take their roles as interpreters seriously.

Recommended Reading
Think of reenactors as temporary staff members. You will not have enough time to train them to the same level as your permanent guides or interpreters, but you should consider staging a brief training session about your site ahead of or at the outset of an event. You can provide reenactors with primary and secondary source material ahead of an event; many enjoy reading up on the history of the site they will be visiting and helping to interpret. If your reenactment is a single-day event, gather participants before the site opens. If you are hosting a weekend reenactment, consider gathering all participants, or at least unit leaders, at a Saturday morning meeting (many reenactors may not arrive until late Friday night). At this meeting, briefly outline the main interpretive goals of the weekend’s programming. If, for example, you are hosting a World War II event with both military encampments and homefront displays, you should remind reenactors to encourage visitors to stop at multiple locations to think about things like mobilization, rationing, military training, and gender roles. Encourage reenactors to bring up key interpretive points in their interactions with visitors.

**Recommended Reading**

Some special programming requires more extensive training, as discussed in the appended article by Elizabeth Sulock and Kirsten Hammerstrom: “Risky Business: Living History Events in Traditional Museums.” *ALHFAM Bulletin* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 5–10.
Is reenacting right for my site?

The most successful reenactments at historic sites are directly related to a site’s interpretive goals and programming. Before staging a reenactment or hosting guest reenactors, consider what you want your site and visitors to get out of the experience.

**Pros**

Reenactments often bring in visitors who might not otherwise visit your site and allow you to take advantage of an enthusiastic and knowledgeable group of amateur historians – reenactors. If your site does not normally have costumed interpreters, a reenactment is an opportunity to populate it with people in period clothing. If you use living history interpretation normally, reenactors can help with programming that requires more people to be convincing, such as reenacted military drills, church services, or political rallies.

**Cons**

Hosting reenactments can be time-consuming and costly (see page 11). If you are hosting a weekend-long reenactment, reenactors will need to camp or stay on your site, may wish to dig fire pits for cooking, and will otherwise impact your historic landscape. Well ahead of an event, establish policies for where reenactors can go (which historic buildings they can use, for example), whether they can use and handle furnishings and collections objects (whether they can cook in a house’s hearth, for example), and whether they can bring and use their own items within parts of your site (whether they can bring more material into a kitchen for cooking purposes, for example).

**Recommended Reading**

For more on the logistics of hosting a battle reenactment, including a walkthrough of what happens over the course of a weekend event, see Jim O’Brien’s appended article: “The British Are Coming and So Are the Guests: Best Practices and Policies for Hosting Military Reenactments.” *ALHFAM Bulletin* 43, no. 3 (Spring 2013): 6–10.
There is no single national organization of reenactors, though there are some umbrella organizations that represent numerous individual groups, such as the “National Regiment” or the “Brigade of the American Revolution,” to take only two examples. Smaller reenactor organizations are like clubs. Each is generally called a unit (after the military use of the term) or a group. Most units comprise fewer (sometimes many fewer) than 50 members and are based in a particular local area or state. Many adopt a historical military designation, such as the 8th Ohio Volunteer Infantry or the 40th Regiment of Foot, while also including members who portray civilians. The leadership structure of reenactment groups varies, but often one or two people serve as the leaders of a single unit. These are the individuals you will work with to arrange a reenactment.

Recommended Reading

The type of organizations you decide to work with, and whether you allow individuals to attend an event without unit affiliation, will impact your reenactment. This is discussed in Mark A. Turdo’s appended article: “Reenactors in the House: Planning the Big Event.” In Proceedings of the 2009 Conference and Annual Meeting, Old Salem Museums and Gardens, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, June 6-9, 2009, edited by Debra Ann Reid, Ron Kley, and Radcliffe, 135–139. North Bloomfield, OH: The Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums, 2010.

Civil War reenactors at Appomattox Court House National Historic Park.
The easiest way to find reenactor groups for programs is to look locally. Ask your staff and colleagues at other sites if they know of any local organizations of reenactors of the time period in question. Attending a reenactment at another site is also a great way to learn about the hobby and identify potential reenactors for your site. Reenactors have a substantial web presence, making it easy to find groups in your area. Sending an email to the contact address on a webpage is the best way to begin a conversation and identify the person who leads a group.

Not all reenactment groups are equal. The reenactors who are closest to your site may not always be the best (see page 10). How you want to use reenactors at your site will impact whether you can draw better quality reenactors from more of a distance (by, for example, offering a unique historical setting or activity that they cannot find in their own neighborhood).

It is a good idea to interview potential reenactment groups or individuals as you would any other volunteer or employee. Along with gathering basic information, ask these questions:

- What sort of experience do they have conducting reenactments at public historic sites?
- What sort of activities do they like to do at an event?
- How many reenactors does their group usually bring to a reenactment?
- Can they provide references from other historic sites where they have reenacted?

Some sites manage a reenactment by appointing a host unit that handles certain logistical tasks such as recruiting and managing participants. Wait until you have become acquainted with some of the reenactors who may participate in your event before approaching a group about this role.

Recommended Reading

How historically accurate reenactors appear to be – and therefore how they contribute to your site’s interpretation – depends on the quality and details of their garments and the objects they use. Despite the claims of most reenactor groups that they are authentic, many have noticeable flaws in their material culture, the objects they wear and use. You might not realize that authenticity is one of the most sensitive and divisive issues among reenactors, and that there is a wide spectrum in the historical quality of their material culture and appearances.

Authenticity is important but subjective. To vet reenactors ahead of an event, ask them to provide images of their group or look for photos on their website. Ask a curator or colleague with material culture knowledge to review these images and look for issues that might detract from your interpretation plans (for example, excessive camp furniture and cooking equipment in a military unit that is ostensibly portraying an army on active campaign).

Make your standards clear ahead of an event and distribute them along with registration materials. You will need to enforce standards at an event, asking reenactors to remove or conceal visible, inauthentic items that they may forget or ignore, such as contemporary wristwatches, eyeglasses, and footwear, or food coolers.

**Recommended Reading**

Some sites distribute material culture guidelines in advance of an event. For particularly strong examples, see the guidelines of Fort Ticonderoga (an eighteenth-century historic site) for male soldiers and female “army women” at 2016 Revolutionary War reenactments as well as the Rhode Island Historical Society’s standards for women at a recent event, appended. Don’t let these exhaustive guidelines overwhelm you. Your site can distribute much briefer – but still very effective – guidelines that discourage things like modern make-up, glasses, and wristwatches, for example.
Hosting a reenactment can vary in cost. How much your site spends on a reenactment will depend on its scale. Many sites find it more effective to hold a weekend-long (Friday-Sunday) reenactment, but single-day reenactments are also not unusual, particularly if some aspect of the site prohibits overnight camping by reenactors. Here are the essential costs involved in a typical reenactment:

- Staff preparation time
- Paid Advertising
- Amenities (for reenactors)
  - Firewood
  - Straw (a common bedding material for reenactors in camps)
  - Ice (for cooling food)
  - Portable toilets
  - Drinking and washing water sources

Recommended Reading

For a very helpful guide to reenactment planning and logistics, see the appended article by Deb Fuller: “Creating a Toolkit for Hosting Reenactments, Living History Timelines, and Other Reenactor Events at Your Site.” In Proceedings of the 2015 Conference and Annual Meeting, 212–222. North Bloomfield, OH: The Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums, 2015.
Should we pay reenactors?

Reenactors deserve some form of compensation for their involvement with your site. They spend substantial sums of money acquiring equipment (both original antiques and reproductions of objects from the past) and travelling to and from events. Reenactments not affiliated with historic sites have aims besides historical interpretation (namely, reenactor entertainment or performances for paying spectators) and so can attract reenactors who will come for free or even pay a registration fee. On the other hand, offering some form of compensation to reenactors who come to your historic site will help build a successful and sustainable relationship between your site and people who are, for a weekend at least, your staff members. Compensation examples include monetary payments, complementary museum memberships, and one or more free meals. Even relatively inexpensive meals, such as cookouts, go a long way in endearing your site to reenactors. Most reenactment groups accept payments in a single sum made out to their unit, but only some are registered non-profits. Some sites award money to different groups based on how many individual reenactors each brings.

WWII reenactors portraying Australian troops at Fort Meigs, Ohio.
Military reenactors carry reproduction or antique firearms (guns). In battle reenactments and demonstrations, they fire **blank rounds**, which make an explosion but do not fire any bullet or projectile. Blank rounds can still be dangerous at close range.

Most reenactors are quite safety conscious, but it is up to you to determine how your site will inspect and monitor firearms, where you will allow demonstrations to take place, and how reenactors are allowed to use their guns on your site. Reputable reenactor groups will inspect their own weapons as often as necessary, and some sites delegate a knowledgeable staff member to observe or assist in this process. You should schedule all firing demonstrations for specific times to prevent confusion about gunfire. Select a location that allows visitors to see demonstrations but also keeps them from being downrange (in front) of any gunfire.

You should make your policies about firearms handling clear to reenactors. Some sites, for example, will allow visitors to lift or handle a reenactor’s firearm only if the reenactor is holding it at the same time. Local laws and site policies may determine how firearms are used in a particular place.

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**Recommended Reading**

The New Jersey Living History Advisory Council has posted a very useful set of guidelines, especially relevant to pre-1820 black powder firearms, at [http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/historic/njlhac/docs/njlhac_black_powder_use_guidelines.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/historic/njlhac/docs/njlhac_black_powder_use_guidelines.pdf).

The National Park Service has shared all of its safety manuals at [https://www.nps.gov/stri/manuals.htm](https://www.nps.gov/stri/manuals.htm).
Contracts

As temporary employees/volunteers, individual reenactors should sign a contract that outlines their duties, specifies any payment or benefits they receive, and includes a release if the host site will be taking photographs or video of reenactors and spectators during the event. This contract should also stipulate any actions that may result in the removal of reenactors from the site. In particular, if your site does not allow alcohol, you should make this policy clear to reenactors who might otherwise drink on-site after the day’s activities end. Liability is also very important, and you should have reenactors sign a liability waiver.

Many reenactor organizations carry insurance policies, and you should investigate how your site’s insurance may intersect with reenactors’. Consult with a legal professional to determine how local regulations, your site’s policies, and other laws impact a reenactment at your site.

A reenactor portraying Pocahontas at Henricus Historical Park, Virginia. Courtesy Samantha McCarty

Recommended Reading

In Appendix A, you can find samples of registration and liability releases from recent events at historic sites.
Reenactments can be an exciting, dynamic programming addition to your historic site. In their best forms, reenactments allow visitors to gain new experiences of the sights and sounds of the past. They also allow you to connect with an enthusiastic constituent group – reenactors – who will become invested in your site’s success and sustainability. Reenactors love history, and you can attract groups and individuals who emphasize authenticity and enjoy interpretation by offering them unique opportunities such as unusual programming, insider access to your historic site, and a chance to engage with the public about history.

This packet and the materials in the appendices are only introductory. There is much more available online. We encourage you to contact Sustaining Places and the Museum Studies Program at the University of Delaware (trputman@udel.edu) with questions, comments, and suggestions for future versions of this packet.
Glossary

**Authentic:** A term reenactors use with many different connotations. Generally, “authentic” implies a close adherence to the material details of the past.

**Battle reenactment:** A reenactment whose main focus is on the recreation of historical combat.

**Blank rounds:** The ammunition used by reenactors. Blank rounds contain an explosive but do not fire any projectile. They are still dangerous, but only at close range.

**Event:** A reenactor term for any type of reenactment activity. A weekend battle reenactment is an “event.” Common types of events include battle reenactments, living history events, private events, and timeline events.

**Farb:** A derisive term used by reenactors for an inauthentic reenactor (a “farb”) or inaccurate material culture (a “farby” item).

**First-person interpretation:** An interpretive technique in which a living historian acts and speaks as if he or she is an actual person in the past. A first-person interpreter would say, “It is 1776, and the United States has just declared independence.”

**Group:** The most basic, club-like reenactment organization. A synonym for unit, though sometimes used in its place for civilian or other non-military reenactment organizations.

**Host unit:** A reenactment unit that handles some or all of the duties of planning a reenactment, including recruiting other units, collecting registration information, establishing campsites, coordinating battles, and other details.

**Impression:** The combination of clothing, equipment, and knowledge that represents a particular moment in history. A reenactor portraying a person from the American Revolution might have a “British soldier impression,” for example.
**Glossary (continued)**

**Interpretive authority**: Control of the historical narrative your site presents to the public.

**Living historian**: A costumed interpreter who uses reproduction and/or original historical objects as teaching tools.

**Living history event**: A reenactment focused on interpreting non-battle activities or where military combat is only one small part of a larger program focused on interpretation and education conducted by costumed interpreters.

**Living history interpretation**: An interpretive methodology involving the wearing of historical clothing and performance of historical activities while interacting with an audience, usually at a historic site.

**Material culture**: Objects people make and use.

**Original**: A term reenactors use to designate antique items dating to a time period in question. An “original” Civil War musket would have been made before 1865.

**Private Event**: A reenactment staged for participants only, with no spectators.

**Registration fees**: Fees paid by reenactors to the host unit or site to cover expenses and/or as a fundraising initiative for charities such as historic preservation.

**Reproduction**: A term reenactors use to designate items copied or inspired by antiques as well as documentary or photographic evidence. A “reproduction” Civil War musket would be based on antiques and documentary evidence, but it could have been made yesterday.
Glossary (continued)

**Third-person interpretation**: An interpretive technique in which a living historian, though wearing historical clothing, does not portray a historical character. A third-person interpreter would say, “In 1776, the United States declared independence.”

**Timeline event**: Reenactments featuring people portraying multiple time periods, often set up in a linear “timeline” of stationary camps that guests can visit.

**Umbrella organization**: A large reenactor organization that coordinates and represents a number of smaller units.

**Unit**: The most basic, club-like reenactment organization. A synonym for group, though sometimes used in its place for specifically military reenactment organizations.
Appendix A: Sample Contracts and Guidelines
**WHL. Wallace Memorial Event – Participant Form**

La Salle Co., A Patriotic Appeal, Seneca, IL - August 27, & 28, 2016

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### INFORMATION SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Mailing Address:</td>
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### REENACTORS

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<td>Cavalry</td>
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<td>Sutler /other</td>
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<td>Confederate</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Civilian</td>
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</tbody>
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### REENACTMENT DESCRIPTION

Description of reenactment including any special demonstrations, displays and equipment:

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* Please no unaccompanied minors under 18 years old

### TENTAGE

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<th>Type</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Total square footage / footprint of tentage:**

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Information on this form must be submitted no later than July 1st for early registration. After early registration, sutlers and vendors shall be subject to $25 registration fee, participants may not receive event benefits.

Please email this completed form to gen_wallace@outlook.com

Or mail to: “WHL. Wallace Memorial Event; Ottawa, IL” Committee C/O Ottawa Avenue Cemetery Association | 1601 Ottawa Avenue Ottawa, Illinois 61350
Release and Indemnity Agreement

This form must be completed in its entirety prior to the above individual's participation in the event. Participants' signature is required on this form prior to the individual's participation. All applications are subject to review.

Adherence to Authenticity & Safety Standards

- The principles for the event are established for western civil war theater impressions, based on the historical data for the particular historical units portrayed.
- Local historical impressions are welcome and favored, but must be properly documented.
- Only officers, cavalry troopers, and specific artillery personnel are authorized to carry short arms. Other participants are specifically prohibited from carrying short arms in formation or into any engagement, drill or other activity.
- All edged weapons will have a dulled edge and shall be carried in a properly designed scabbard. Belt knives, daggers, Bowie knives, and alike are prohibited and will not be carried by any participant in the field. Participants carrying small pocket knives shall ensure they are properly secured (sheathed, folded) and placed in a closed compartment (saddle bag, haversack, knapsack, etc.) when in formation.
- All artillery pieces must conform to safety guidelines, and must meet minimum standards of material and construction as required to determine that the piece is safe to operate.
- Non-period articles are not permitted to be visible in the camps during public hours. After public hours, non-period articles affecting neighboring camps, such as modern lights, loud radios, etc. are not allowed during the event. Participants should make EVERY effort to minimize, if not eliminate, non-period items being present in the open at all times, in consideration of other members' attempts to create a more authentic event experience.
- Modern, privately-owned vehicles are not allowed in the military camps, without prior approval.
- Signage (recruiting posters, etc.) are to be displayed as reproductions of originals.
- Firewood, water, and portable toilets are provided.
- Early military registrants will be provided with powder bounty.
- Approved cook fires should be placed per camp plans, and should be separated from tentage for safety. Fire suppression (containers filled with water, dirt, etc.) should be placed near each fire in case of emergency.
- Onsite sign in, and Release and Indemnity Agreement form completion required for all participants.
- Alcoholic beverages are not allowed onsite.

In consideration of the permission extended to me by the Ottawa Avenue Cemetery Association, the Reddick Mansion Association, FFA, and the Seneca High School, to participate in the WHL. Wallace Memorial Event on August 27 & 28, 2016 and for other valuable consideration for myself, and/or my minor child/ward, my spouse, heirs, executors, administrators, personal representatives, and assigns do hereby FULLY AND FOREVER RELEASE AND DISCHARGE the above aforesaid, and their agents, representatives and all persons whomever directly or indirectly liable, from any and all claims and demands, actions and causes of action, damage, costs, loss of services, expenses, and any and all other claims of damages whatsoever, both in law and equity, on account of, or resulting from, personal injuries, conscious suffering, death, or property damage suffered by me or my minor child/ward, whether directly or indirectly or in any manner connected to any of the activities on the premises of the aforesaid event.

In signing this release, I acknowledge and represent that I have read the above foregoing release, hold harmless and indemnification agreement, understand it and sign it voluntarily as my own free act and deed; no oral representations, statements, or inducements, apart from the foregoing written agreement have been made; I am at least (18) years of age and fully competent; and I execute this release for full, adequate and complete consideration fully intending to be bound by same. I am responsible for all minors in attendance in our party and at no time will they be left unaccompanied.

Participant Organization's / Unit's Name:

Print Participant's Name: Date:  
Signature:

Information on this form must be submitted no later than July 1st for early registration. After early registration, sutlers and vendors shall be subject to $25 registration fee, participants may not receive event benefits.

Please email this completed form to gen_wallace@outlook.com

Or mail to: “WHL. Wallace Memorial Event; Ottawa, IL” Committee C/O Ottawa Avenue Cemetery Association | 1601 Ottawa Avenue Ottawa, Illinois 61350
Release from Liability

In consideration of receiving permission from the Rhode Island Historical Society (hereafter RIHS) to enter upon the premises identified, the receipt of such permission being hereby acknowledged, and in consideration of receiving permission to participate in any military or historical re-enactments held on the premises, I the undersigned, do hereby release RIHS, its agents, officers, employees, and volunteers, and any and all subordinate or affiliated organizations or persons sponsoring, hosting or associated with such activity, of and from any liability, claims, demands, actions and causes of action whatsoever, arising out of or related to any loss, damage or injury, including death, that may be sustained by me or my property while in or on these premises.

I am duly aware of the risks and hazards inherent upon entering said premises, and/or enroute to or from the same, and in participating in any activities held on said premises. I hereby voluntarily elect to enter upon said premises and/or participate in such activities knowing the present condition and intended use of said premises, and knowing that said condition and/or use may become hazardous during the time I am upon said premises. I assume all risk, loss, damage, or injury, including death, which may be sustained by me, or to my property, while upon said premises or enroute to or from the same. This release shall be binding upon my distributees, heirs, next of kin, executors and administrators.

In signing the foregoing, I hereby acknowledge that I have read this release, understand it, and sign it voluntarily. I am of sound mind, not a minor, and over the age of majority. If the parent of a minor child who is participating, I hereby sign on his/her behalf.

Signed: ____________________________ Date: __________
Print your name: ____________________________
Print unit name: ____________________________
Address: __________________________________
_____________________________________
Telephone: ________________________________
Emergency Contact information: ______________________________
Permission to Use Photograph

Event: What Cheer Day

Location: John Brown House Museum, Providence, RI

I grant to The Rhode Island Historical History the right to take photographs of me and my family in connection with the above-identified event. I authorize The Rhode Island Historical History, its assigns and transferees to copyright, use and publish the same in print and/or electronically.

I agree that The Rhode Island Historical History may use such photographs of me with or without my name and for any lawful purpose, including for example such purposes as publicity, illustration, advertising, and Web content.

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Printed name ______________________________

Address __________________________________

Date _____________________________________

Signature, parent or guardian _______________________

(if under age 18)

Courtesy the Rhode Island Historical Society and Kirsten Hammerstrom.

Authenticity Standards and Code of Conduct for Interpreters

What Cheer Day (WCD) is a first-person interpretive living history event at the John Brown House Museum (JBHM) intended to provide visitors and interpreters alike with a positive and immersive experience of daily life in early Federal Providence.

Although the JBHM has been modified by subsequent owners since its completion in 1788, major portions of the house retain their 18th century character, and the house is furnished with a combination of Brown family furniture and other period pieces. During What Cheer Day, interpreters cross the barriers to occupy the display rooms, and use the spaces in ways that reflect and typify the life of an elite New England family and their servants in early Federal Providence. Replicas of period furniture will be provided for use, however remember you will be moving through rooms containing original furnishings and objects.

We ask that interpreters respect not just the furnishings, but each other and our visitors. During the hours when we are open to the public, interpreters should use and respect the social conventions of the time as much as possible. Arguments are expected, in character: the delivery man and the apprentice will be thrown out of the house, and Mr Herreshoff’s business acumen challenged. We will engage in these acted arguments as characters, to bring to life the conflicts and questions of the past.

Logistics will not be perfectly accurate. Because the house has undergone change over time, we are not able to represent domestic activities in the house as they occurred.

The side stairs that ended in a door on the Benefit Street (west) side of the house were removed around 1900, and the door bricked up; the mid-19th century addition at the back of the house turned the back door into a hallway. Deliveries will therefore come to the front door, inaccurate but dramatic, thus allowing visitors to better understand the kind of supply networks that supported John Brown’s household, and giving Mrs Brown, her housekeeper and other household members a steady stream of action.

The fortune teller will also come to house. We know Julia Bowen and her friends visited Goody Morris and other Providence fortune tellers in 1799 and 1800, but we do not have the luxury of taking our visitors along on a trip to downtown Providence in 1800, so “Goody Morris” will visit us instead.
Because we are interpreting 1800 as accurately as we can, here are our standards for clothing and appearance.

**General Appearance**
No make up: mascara, lipstick, rouge, and eye shadow as we know them are not used in this period and not appropriate for What Cheer Day. Unobtrusive foundation and concealer are acceptable, especially for those who might be sewing late the night before. Nail polish should not be worn.

No modern (plastic) eyeglasses. Contacts, period glasses or reproduction frames are preferred; modern frames of simple wire shapes are acceptable.

**Women**

**Caps**
Maids: Caps required. Lappet caps are prevalent in Rhode Island ca. 1800, but round-eared caps are also acceptable.

Brown Family: Caps optional, depending on who you will be representing; Sarah Brown and her sister, Ruth Smith, would most likely have worn caps, while Sally and Alice would have foregone caps in favor of fashionable hair styles.


The RIHS has a gallery of miniatures and silhouettes you may find useful, though dates need to be updated: [http://www.rihs.org/connect/online-exhibits-miniatures-and-silhouettes-gallery/](http://www.rihs.org/connect/online-exhibits-miniatures-and-silhouettes-gallery/)

**Bonnets**
Silk and straw bonnets are seen in fashion plates, and Julia Bowen describes young women in Providence “altering their cold scoops into Rosina hats,” and mentions walking up “to Mr. John Whipple’s with the purpose of purchasing a green bonnet.” Silk bonnets in a variety of shapes and with a wide variety of trims are available, and re-making bonnets would have been common. Materials and trims even more than shape determine the “class” of a bonnet, and should be selected to match your impression, and whether you are coming to visit the house, running errands, or staying in all day.
**Jewelry**
Any jewelry worn should be period appropriate and correct for your impression. Multi piercings are not correct in this period, but exceptions are made if you cannot remove your earrings and also do not wear a cap.

**Shift**
This white linen undergarment is worn by all women in this time period. If you are borrowing clothing, a shift will be provided for you if you do not have a shift or chemise that will work.

**Stays**
This foundation garment is worn over the shift; stays are essential to creating a period-appropriate silhouette. In the early Federal era, the silhouette is less cone-like and more natural than in the mid-18th century, and some women find that ‘Edwardian’ corsets, sports bras or other modern lingerie can achieve the desired look. If you are borrowing clothes, please bring whatever corset you may have, or a sports bra.

**Petticoat**
Bodiced or strapped petticoats are worn under gowns; some women wear two, while others prefer one. If you are borrowing clothes, a petticoat will be provided for you.

**Gown**
High-waisted, drawstring-front gowns are common in this period, bib-front gowns seem to be a bit later, with back-closing gowns later still-- it appears to be a matter of just a few years. The biggest difference between mistress and maid is in quality of material and finish more than style.

**Spencers and Cloaks**
Although I have not yet found an extant Spencer with a Rhode Island provenance, in 1799, tailor Joseph Taber advertises in the Providence paper that he “makes Ladies habits and Spencers in the latest fashions,” so they were known and probably worn in this period. Cloaks were definitely still worn; there is a ca. 1790 long cloak with a hood in the RIHS collection and cloaks appear in newspaper advertisements.

**Stockings**
There are extant hand-knit wool stockings in natural white with a Providence provenance to the early 19th century; upper class women would probably have worn silk, frame-knit stockings.

**Shoes**
Pointed-toe slippers in silk would be most correct; leather next most correct for the Browns. Leather buckled shoes and round-toed, tied leather shoes also acceptable, given what is readily available today.

Courtesy the Fort Ticonderoga Association.

Note: These guidelines were shared with participants via Fort Ticonderoga’s website and were heavily illustrated with photographs of correctly attired reenactors.

Massachusetts Line Regiments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John Patterson’s Brigade</th>
<th>Roche de Fermoy’s Brigade</th>
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<tr>
<td>Samuel Brewer 12th Mass.</td>
<td>Seth Warner’s Additional Regiment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gamaliel Bradford 14th Mass.</td>
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The extensive military and supply organization of Massachusetts was stretched by raising its congressional quota of fourteen Continental line regiments, and subsequently two additional regiments in 1777. Regimental coats do appear on deserters, both newly made and perhaps left over from the Massachusetts continental regiments of 1776. Advertisements describe a wide range of colors even within the same regiment. A deserter from Colonel Marshall’s Tenth regiment was described in a March, 17th Connecticut Courant advertisement wearing, “light colored coat with red facings, brown waistcoat, leather breeches and half boots.” In September, a deserter from the same regiment was described wearing, “blue coat red facings, white waistcoat and breeches, black stockings,” in the Boston Gazette. Colonel Bradford may have been able to get some nice regimental clothing for his regiment. A drummer deserted in February wearing what may have been a musician’s uniform of a red coat with black facings, and white shoes. Two deserters from the same regiment left in February wearing, “an old Soldier’s Coat,” and “an old Soldier’s Coat, faced with white Cloth.” Likely, these old 1776 regimental coats were of Brown, or similar cloth colored cloth, as with so many coats made in that year. More deserters from Bradford’s regiment in October show regimental coats, such as, “dark brown coat faced light blue, reddish brown waistcoat, peach blossom colored trousers” and, “blue coat faced white, dark colored waistcoat, long trousers” German accounts from the other side of the firing line also describe some uniforms on Massachusetts soldiers. German letters about their surrender at Saratoga describe, “Few of the officers in General Gates’ army wore uniforms, and those that were worn were evidently of home manufacture and of all colors. For example, brown coats
with sea-green facings, white linings, and silver dragons (epaulettes or shoulder knots), and gray coats with yellow buttons and straw facings, where to be seen in plenty.” This description is corroborated by the Von Germann watercolors which depict an officer in a short brown coat with scarlet facings, and a private in a short grey coat with yellow facings and linings.

Even in the Massachusetts line, this smattering of regimental clothing was outweighed by civilian clothing brought from home. Among the civilian clothing leather breeches and canvas trousers seem to be the most common. Leather breeches appear so commonly among deserters from Massachusetts in 1777 that they may have been issued by some officers. In the 1776 campaign they were mandated as part of the Continental clothing bounty. Their frequent appearance in deserter descriptions could reflect how common they were as a civilian garment. Thanks in part to the relative wealth of the state and its officers, the five Massachusetts line regiments stationed at Ticonderoga received quite a large amount of clothing. Shoes, shirts, stockings, jackets, hats, and waistcoats were issued in large numbers to Massachusetts soldiers at Ticonderoga. In some regiments, every soldier received a new shirt and pair of shoes while at Ticonderoga. Some issues of coats appear in these same records, but it’s unclear if these were civilian coats packed into public stores, or some of the sporadic regimental coats that appear on deserters. Some regiments, like Marshall’s tenth regiment drew considerable numbers of hunting shirts from continental stores at Ticonderoga. Likewise there were some linen overalls issued to Massachusetts soldiers from the public store at Ticonderoga. In time for Saratoga, Massachusetts soldiers would get complete issues of these two garments from public stores in Albany. The German diary of J. F. Wasmus, describes hunting shirts saying, “The latter wear a short white shirt over their clothes, the sleeves being bordered by a number of rows of white linen fringes.”

Arms and equipment were equally hit or miss for Massachusetts regulars. General St. Clair in his 1778 court martial would claim that he had, “2000 [Men that] were ill equipped and worse armed, not above one bayonet in ten, an are essential in the defence of lines---that with these 2000 I have made good a retreat under the nose of an army at least four times their number.” On April 21st of 1777 Massachusetts received their purchase of 5000 complete French stand of arms, with bayonets, flints, scabbards, and worms. These were rapidly issued out as the diary of Lt. Henry Sewell records.

April 18th, 1777 ‘no blankets available in Boston’
April 25th, 1777 ‘exchanged old arms for new French muskets’
April 26th, 1777 ‘drew gun slings and knapsacks’

Despite Lieutenant Sewell recording the issuance of French Muskets, the whole regiment was not so lucky, with nearly half of the regiment’s guns list as in Bad condition on June 17th, 1777. Major William Hull succinctly described the condition of his command within Colonel Jackson’s regiment on August 13th, 1777.

THIS may certify, that the detachment of Colonel Michael Jackson’s regiment, which was under my command at Ticonderoga at the time of its evacuation, was very poorly cloathed, many of their arms our of repair, and about one third of them destitute of bayonets.
**Coats**

Civilian coats, regimental coats, and hunting shirts are all equally good for a Massachusetts regular portrayal. Among civilian coats, short nautical styles appear commonly like, “a Sailor’s Habit,” or, “a blue Sailor’s Jacket.” Brown or drab coats appear with frequency on deserters, such as, “on an old Surtout, brown Colour,” or “a brown Coat.” There are some exceptions, like an October advertisement for a deserter from Bradford’s regiment which listed, “one reddish coat, striped jacket, black breeches.”

Best 1: Hand-finished, well-fit, wool broadcloth short or long coats of drab, brown, red, or blue, made either straight-bodied or cutaway.

The German copies of the Von-Germann watercolors, distinctly show short regimental coats on the American Soldier and American Officer. This style is corroborated by portraits of other American officers earlier in the war. Advertisements from the firm of Otis & Andrews, requesting coats made unlined or faced with the outer body cloth, as well as Washington’s later complaints about contractor made coats hint that these coats were likely made unlined or only partially lined. These coats likely could have had non-functional lapels, merely stitched down. The Von-Germann watercolors show pointed cuffs on the sleeves. The point centers on the top of the sleeve seem, with or without buttons set along the outside of the bottom seam. The pocket flaps are shown vertical, but canted forward at the top. The Von Germann Watercolors appear to show four buttons, but three would be fine as well. Both the officer and soldier are shown with the coats front corner turned back with some sort of loop onto the second or third button on the pocket flap. This reveals the coat lining which is the same color as the facings. Pockets, if the garments had any, were set into the coat tail lining. There is little evidence for regimental buttons on these coats. Almost all regimental buttons recovered at Fort Ticonderoga are from 1776 documented regiments. Coat-sized pewter or similar buttons appear to be the most common buttons on these coats. Brown coats to drab coats with red, white, blue or sea green facings all are documentable. Likewise, blue coats faced with red or white are
appropriate. Grey faced with buff or yellow is shown in the Von-Germann watercolors and specifically mentioned by Surgeon J F Wasmus. The coats recommended for Fourth Connecticut model company events are perfectly suitable.

Best 2: Contract-made regimental short-coats, made with slanted vertical pockets, pointed cuffs, stitched-down or functional lapels of broadcloth or kersey, made half-lined (in facing-colored serge, bay, or flannel) or unlined.

Hunting shirts appear in large numbers in some Massachusetts regular regiments. From Continental stores at Fort Ticonderoga Colonel Jackson’s regiment drew 238 hunting shirts, Colonel Marshall’s regiment drew 36, and Colonel Bradford’s regiment drew 116. One deserter from Colonel Francis’ regiment was described in, “a Toe Frock, Moose skin Breeches,” on June 7, 1777. The majority of these hunting shirts were of cheap osnaburg or tow-cloth. Brunswick Surgeon’s description of these hunting shirts as “a short white shirt over their clothes, the sleeves being bordered by a number of rows of white linen fringes” likely describes these tow-cloth hunting shirts bleached in the sun. Extant examples like the Captain John Duryea hunting shirt or contemporary German illustrations of American soldiers show hunting shirts with short shoulder capes which end at or just beyond the shoulder. These shirts are made open at the front, with edges trimmed in one or two rows of fringe. All hunting shirts must be made in this manner for the Rear Guard.

Best 3: Osnaburg, split-front hunting shirts, with short capes and fringe.

Unacceptable: Smocks, over-shirts, baggy coats, cotton hunting shirts, Very long hunting shirts.

**Jackets and Waistcoats**

The Massachusetts regiments at Ticonderoga varied in how many jackets or waistcoats they drew from stores. Marshall’s regiment drew by far the most with 27 waistcoats and 244 jackets, though what the distinction between the two signifies is unclear. Other regiments like Bradford’s drew 38 waistcoats and 112 jackets. Continental store records for 1776 show a wide variety of woolen cloth drawn from stores. A variety of cloths, such as, “black bear skin, fine knap[ped] sarge, wide knap[ped cloth] light coloured [purple crossed out], narrow red knap, narrow brown knap, drab cloth, clarrett coloured wide cloth, yds black wide cloth, Brown wide cloth much motheaten -----“ are listed in Quarter Master John Harper’s orderly book in August 1776. Without specific reference to any material, likely waistcoats drawn from stores could have been made from any materials like these. One deserter from Colonel Francis’ regiment was described in a May 15th advertisement wearing, “a white out-side Jacket, a blue Waistcoat, and Leather Breeches.” A deserter from Bradford’s regiment left in October wearing, “reddish coat, striped jacket, black breeches.” The Von Germann watercolor of an American soldier shows him wearing a steel-grey square cut waistcoat while his rendering of an American officer shows a white skirted waistcoat. Both skirted and square cut waistcoats are perfectly acceptable, as are belted waistcoats which appear in many images of Continental soldiers.
Best: Hand-finished, well-fit, single or double-breasted, skirted, square cut or belted waistcoats with or without sleeves made of drab, brown, green, red or blue broadcloth, kersey, or serge.

Acceptable: Well-fit, single or double breasted, skirted or square cut waistcoats of linen, linsey-woolsey, cotton, cotton velvet, or wool plush in solid colors or simple patterns. Sleeved waistcoats are acceptable as the primary outer garment.

Unacceptable: Upholstery fabric waistcoats, extremely long or baggy waistcoats.

**Breeches and Trousers**
Civilian breeches and trousers appear on some Massachusetts regular deserters. Both blue and black wool breeches are specifically described. Leather breeches appear most frequently among deserters, described as, “leather breeches and white stockings,” or “white Leather Breeches.” “Moose skin Breeches” appears on one deserter from Colonel Francis’ regiment on June 7th. Quartermaster’s records for 1776 show hundreds of pairs of leather breeches issued out of continental stores at Ticonderoga. Many of the Massachusetts regiments drew breeches from Ticonderoga stores as well, Colonel Jackson’s regiment drawing the most: 66 pairs. These may have been leather or made of the myriad of woolen fabrics in Continental stores. Jackson’s regiment and Marshall’s regiment both received overalls from Continental stores, 57 and 233 pairs respectively. There was considerable controversy over the shipping of Massachusetts clothing in the spring of 1777. A June 8th letter to James Mease, clothier general, complained that Massachusetts clothing destined for Peekskill did not arrive as planned. This clothing included a “quantity of light Clothing, such as Shirts, Frocks and overalls.” By the 13th of June, correspondence with James Mease speculated that this light clothing had been shipped north to Albany and Ticonderoga as Massachusetts soldiers were ordered north. Most likely the overalls issued out of Continental stores at Ticonderoga were lightweight, osnaburg or similar materials.

Best: Hand-finished, well-fit, leather breeches or trousers of linen or hemp canvas or checked linen. Well-fit osnaburg, ticking, or tow-cloth overalls.

Acceptable: Well-fit leather breeches, breeches with buckled knee bands in black, brown, drab, kersey, linsey-woolsey, serge, cotton velvet, wool plush, broadcloth.

Unacceptable: Fringed trousers, baggy breeches.

**Shirts**
Massachusetts regiments drew a lot of shirts from stores at Ticonderoga. These may have been osnaburg like the overalls and hunting shirts sent north to northern department continental army stores. Much like the rest of their clothing, civilian shirts of typical New England styles were likely mixed in as well.

Best: Hand-stitched shirts made of osnaburg, checked, striped, or white linen with narrow band cuffs and thread Dorset buttons or made for sleeve buttons (cuff links).
Unacceptable: Cotton calico or plaid shirts.

**Neckwear**
Best: Silk, linen, or cotton neckerchiefs; linen neck stocks, or linen rollers, well-tied around the neck

Unacceptable: Military horsehair or leather neck stocks.

**Socks and Stockings**
Best: White or grey wool yarn or worsted stockings or socks seamed with back seams.

Acceptable: No Socks worn with trousers.

Unacceptable: Red, yellow, or polyester stockings.

**Hats and Caps**
Some Massachusetts regiments did draw hats from Ticonderoga’s stores. Colonel Jackson’s and Colonel Marshall’s regiment drew 116 and 167 hats or caps respectively. It is unclear if they actually received a mix of cocked hats and leather caps or if this was merely a convention based on the continental clothing bounty which included either a hat or leather cap. The Von-Germann watercolor shows a small cocked hat on the American officer and what appears to be a small brimmed round hat on the American soldier. Either of these styles of hat is acceptable.

Best: Hand-finished, round blocked, black wool or beaver felt, round hats, fan tail hats, or cocked hats
Acceptable: Leather caps. Knit wool Monmouth, Dutch mutt, or Kilmarnock caps, oval blocked, white felt cocked or round hats.
Discouraged: Grey or brown wool felt hats, cut down felt caps.
Unacceptable: Slouch hats from unfinished blanks, straw hats, fur caps.

**Shoes**
Best: Hand-finished, short or long-quartered, round-toe, shoes with black waxed calf uppers, fitted for buckles. Shoe boots, half-boots high-lows, with black waxed-calf uppers.

Acceptable: Machine made, black leather, shoes with buckles or ties or high-lows.

Discouraged: Moccasins, half-boots worn with trousers.

Unacceptable: Modern Footwear, modern moccasins, civil war bootees, or riding boots(except for field officers).

**Leg wear**
Best: Just stockings or well-fit, hand-finished spatterdashers or half-gaiters of black, brown, or drab wool, canvas or black leather.

Discouraged: Spatterdashers worn with trousers.

Unacceptable: Military gaiters, Indian leggings, baggy spatterdashers.

**Cartridge Pouches**

No evidence has surfaced in writing these guidelines about the issuance of cartridge pouches, which are typically called, “Cartridge Boxes,” quite contrary to British military parlance. On June 25th, 1777 General St. Clair wrote to General Phillip Schuyler saying, “but what can be expected of from troops ill armed, naked and unaccoutred.”

Massachusetts regulars were raised by a draft of the militia, with a given quota from each township drafted for regular service. These draftees would have been equipped according to militia laws for military equipage. Militia laws specifically addressed arms and equipment. The 1776 Militia Act required:

> That each and every Officer and private Soldier of said Militia… shall equip himself, and be constantly provided with a good Fire-Arm, with a Steel or Iron Ramrod, and a Spring to retain the same, a Worm, Priming Wire and Brush, and a Bayonet fitted to his Gun, a Scabbard and Belt therefor, and a Cutting Sword, or a Tomahawk or Hatchet, a Pouch containing a Cartridge Box, that will hold fifteen Rounds of Cartridges at least, a Hundred Buck Shot, a Jack-Knife and Tow for Wadding, six Flints, one Pound of Powder, forty Leaden Balls fitted to his Gun, a Knapsack and Blanket, a Canteen or Wooden Bottle sufficient to hold one Quart.


Whatever the source of cartridge boxes, they were in reasonably good supply. A June return of Colonel Francis’ regiment lists 382 cartridge boxes for 413 men. Likewise Colonel Marshall’s regiment listed 267 cartridge boxes in good condition with 77 wanting on June 17th, 1777. Brown’s Company participants are highly encouraged to re-use their cartridge pouches from that event. Remains from a cartridge pouch with a nearly identical cartridge block and similar flap was recovered from the Lake Champlain in Valcour Bay, the site of the 1776 naval battle.

Best: New England style soft cartridge pouches black or fair leather with approximately 19 round cartridge blocks, narrow black or buff leather straps, or linen webbing shoulder straps.

Acceptable: Small, simple leather shot pouches with narrow leather shoulder straps, or belt loops.

Unacceptable: Belly boxes or shoulder converted belly boxes. British 36 or 29-hole cartridge pouches, New Model American pouches.
Powder Horns
Despite the Massachusetts militia laws, horns were in short supply. Marshall’s regiment listed only 60 in good condition with 284 wanting on June 17th, 1777.

Best: Plain, empty, powder horns with narrow leather straps.

Acceptable: No powder horn to go with a cartridge pouch.

Unacceptable: Native styled powder horns, or black powder filled horns.

Arms
Despite the availability of French Muskets, it appears that there issuance was very incomplete before Massachusetts regulars marched for Ticonderoga. Even though Lieutenant Henry Sewell records exchanging old arms for new French muskets on April 25th, the June 17th, 1777 return for his regiment, Colonel Brewer’s lists, “126 Good,” “121 Bad,” and “10 Wanting.” The June return for Colonel Francis’ regiment indicates that these bad arms may have been a mix of civilian and older arms. While this return lists, 406 arms for 413 men, there were only 294 iron ramrods, leaving 112 either without ramrods or with wooden ramrods. Marshall’s regiment potentially shows a mix of arms as well with a June 17th, 1777 return listing, “258 Good,” “68 Bad,” and “18 Wanting.”

Best: French musket in great condition. Old pattern French, Dutch, British, commercial or American made muskets.

Acceptable: New England style fowlers, English fowlers either plain or modified for a bayonet.

Unacceptable: Virginia or Pennsylvania styled long rifles.

Side Arms
General St. Clair among others bitterly complained about the lack of bayonets, an assertion partially backed up by returns. Marshall’s regiment in their June 17th, 1777 return of arms listed only 156 bayonets for a total of 326 muskets. Colonel Francis’ regiment shows 270 bayonets for 406 arms, a slightly better portion. Interestingly, this same return lists only 160 bayonet belts. Many of the bayonets without scabbards and belts may have been simply fixed to the weapons at all times. Those with bayonet belts likely had simple black leather or webbing bayonet belts.

Best: Waist or shoulder belt carried bayonet.

Acceptable: Bayonet fixed to the musket, no bayonet, or small axes carried in a knapsack or in a belt.

Unacceptable: Horse pistols, naval pistols, unsheathed tomahawks, or belt axes.
Knapsacks and Tumplines
The Diary of Lt. Henry Sewell records drawing knapsacks. However, the return of equipment for Colonel Francis regiment lists 261 knapsacks for 413 men. The Benjamin Warner pack has details similar to those recommended by Massachusetts Colonel Timothy Pickering in his 1775 manual exercise. The pack’s Connecticut provenance makes it a great choice for any New England regular portrayal. It is unclear what soldiers without knapsacks carried. They may have used blanket rolls or tumplines, though blankets were in even shorter supply than knapsacks in the return for Francis’ regiment.

Best: Painted canvas Benjamin Warner or similar pattern knapsacks.

Acceptable Plain single envelope knapsacks, drawstring canvas snapsacks, or hemp tumplines blanket rolls.

Unacceptable: British painted or goatskin knapsacks.

Blankets
The return for Colonel Francis regiment from before the evacuation of the Fort lists only 245 blankets for 413 men. Whether this lists only regimental property and not personal blankets is unclear. It is possible that some of these Massachusetts regulars were without blankets.

Best: 2-3 Point checked, Dutch, or Rose blankets.

Acceptable: No Blanket

Discouraged: Hudson Bay blankets.

Unacceptable: Civil War grey blankets.

Canteens
Best: Wood cheese box, or staved canteens of documented period pattern with narrow leather or linen webbing strap. Cheese box canteens should have narrow leather keepers or narrow iron staples to retain the strap.

Discouraged: Tin canteens of kidney or half-moon shape.

Unacceptable: Wool canteen covers, jacked leather canteens, covered glass bottles, copper canteens, stainless steel canteens, gourd canteens, and Petite Bidon.
Guidelines for “Carry on the Works of the Northern Army” reenactment, Fort Ticonderoga. NY, May 7-8, 2016.

Courtesy the Fort Ticonderoga Association.

Note: These guidelines were shared with participants via Fort Ticonderoga’s website.

CARRY ON THE WORKS IN THE NORTHERN ARMY

New England Army Women

Typical of many units of regulars and militia from New England at Ticonderoga, there is scant evidence for camp followers with Colonel Ebenezer Francis’ Regiment in 1777. The Ticonderoga camp as a whole did have camp women, in a myriad of roles. Eliza Kingsbury, wife of an artificer carpenter stationed at Ticonderoga, wrote in 1779 about traveling to Ticonderoga prior to the 1777 evacuation:

I accompanied [my husband] with two small children and al our effects (which tho not grand, were decent) to Ticonderoga, tho I am entirely unfit, both by nature an constitution for the fatigues of a camp.

The army stationed at Ticonderoga relied on soldiers’ wives and families to perform duties such as laundering soldiers' linens and nursing in the hospitals. Colonel Anthony Wayne, who commanded the Ticonderoga garrison in the winter of 1776 through the spring of 1777, issued orders pertaining camp followers. Though these orders were recorded for his own regiment, they stand none-the-less as evidence for camp followers work in the Ticonderoga camp more broadly.

December 10th 1776...Any woman belonging to the Regt, who shall refuse to wash for the Men, shall be immediately drumm'd out of the Regt, as they are not found in Victuals to distress and render the Men unfit for Duty, but to keep them clean and decent.

December 23rd 1776...All such Women as will wash for the 4th P. B. will be supplied with Wood and Water for that Purpose. The Captains or Officers commanding Companies, will see that it is immediately done, and will also be punctual in paying for all such Washing and make stoppages from the Pay of the Men accordingly.

Some women served as petty sutlers, but beginning in the summer of 1776 a whole market developed to cater to the demands of a large army. These businesses were frequently run by local inhabitants, who traveled to Ticonderoga with their produce and sundry items, selling them to the large population of soldiers. In the fall of 1776, this market of, “Traders and Hucksters,” was regulated by General Orders.

The [Quarter Master General] and his assistants are immediately to regulate the prices to be paid for the several commodities brought to sell, particularly Garden stuff, Venison, cheese, butter, and all other manner of Eatables. For the Future any persons bringing any of the above articles immediately for sale are to carry them to the foot of the glasses of the Old Fort, where the Market is constantly held. Should any persons be detected Monopolizing or Forestalling the Market they will be punished by a Court
Marshall and have their Goods seized for the sick in the Hospital. The Market is to be opened every Day at 8’ o’clock and to be allowed to continue to sunset.

Fashions in New England in the 1770’s followed British modes. Women traveling with Ebenezer Francis’ regiment no doubt attempted to wear respectable, and to some degree fashionable clothing. However, they faced the same difficulties that their soldier husbands did: supplies of clothing at Ticonderoga were limited, and the surrounding area did not provide many more options. Many of the men who evacuated the Ticonderoga on July 6th wore the same clothes they had arrived in months before. This reality was likely reflected in their wives’ wardrobes as well.

Shift

Best: hand-stitched in white or natural linen or white wool flannel with sleeves gathered into narrow cuffs at the elbows. Cuffs should close with sleeve buttons, or ties threaded through buttonholes. Neckline should be large enough that the shift barely shows when worn with a gown or jacket.

Acceptable: Machine-stitched (ideally hand-finished) in white linen, wool flannel, or cotton with elbow length sleeves.

Unacceptable: Long sleeves, obvious machine sewing, gathered neckline, neck or sleeve ruffles longer than 1.25 inches.
Stays

Best: Hand-sewn, fully boned stays with worsted or linen exterior fabric, the most common colors being dark green, blue or white. Stays should create a proper 1770’s silhouette, which is to say a smooth conical torso. Most stays in this period are back lacing.

Acceptable: Machine-sewn stays which produce the correct silhouette. Partially boned stays, leather stays. No stays, if worn with a bedgown. This is acceptable only for women doing serious manual labor, those portraying the ill, or those in a state of undress early in the morning, or after retiring for the evening.

Unacceptable: Unboned bodices.

Upper body garment

Best: Hand-sewn, stomacher-fronted or center-front closing English style gown in worsted, stuff, linen, or printed cotton. Printed cotton textiles must be well-documented to the period. Bed gown in solid or striped worsted, stuff, linen, or small-motif printed cotton. Fitted jackets are also appropriate, but were less common than gowns.

Acceptable: Hand-finished stomacher or center-front closing gown, fitted jacket, or bedgown.

Unacceptable: Sleeveless bodices. Fitted garments such as gowns or jackets worn without stays. Garments made of printed cottons with designs not documented to the period, such as modern calicos, and cabbage roses.
**Petticoats**

Best: 2 to 4 hand-sewn petticoats; striped, or matching a gown or jacket. Petticoats can be made of linen, worsted, flannel, serge, or lindsey-woolsey. Quilted petticoats are extremely common as well. Length should be between low-calf and ankle, circumference between 2.5 and 3 yards. Petticoats should be pleated to waistbands and have pocket slits at the sides.

Acceptable: Two or more hand-finished petticoats of the proper length.

Unacceptable: Modern skirts, petticoats without sufficient fullness, or shorter than mid-calf.

**Pockets**

Worn underneath the petticoats and accessible through the pocket slits, most period pockets are quite large (often 18 inches long), and are used to store all sorts of women’s personal items. Some pockets were beautifully embroidered, however most of the time pockets will not show. Pockets should absolutely be worn beneath another layer of clothing.

**Apron**

Best: White or checked linen are most common. Images also show women who are doing work wearing blue and occasionally green aprons, likely of wool. Aprons should be long enough to cover a majority of the petticoat, and at least a yard in width.

Unacceptable: Very short or very narrow aprons. Wildly colored aprons. Aprons longer than the petticoats they are worn with. Decorative aprons with ruffles or lace (unless portraying an officer’s wife). Bibbed “pinner” aprons on adult women.
**Neck Handkerchief**

Best: Most depictions from the era show white linen or cotton cut in a triangle, or a square folded into a triangle, large enough to be draped around the shoulders and cover the bosom. Examples of “flag” silk handkerchiefs, and checked wool handkerchiefs also exist. Colored and printed cotton handkerchiefs are likewise documentable. Neck handkerchiefs can be worn under the neckline of the gown or pinned to the front of the gown.

Acceptable: Any sort of neck handkerchief properly worn. The vast majority of images show everyday women wearing some sort of handkerchief covering.

Unacceptable: Handkerchief tucked into the sides of the gown neckline, exposing the bosom.

**Cap**

Best: There are a wide variety of cap styles in use in the 1770’s. In general, cap and hair styles have some height and volume in this period. Caps should be hand-sewn out of fine white linen or cotton organdy. Most cap styles have a gathered or pleated ruffle around the face. Caps may be trimmed with silk ribbon. Caps should be starched if possible.

Unacceptable: Mob caps (circular caps consisting of one piece of material gathered to create both caul and ruffle). Caps worn down over the forehead. No cap.

**Hair**

Best: This will depend on social class. That said, hair styles in the 1770’s are fairly large and even army women on campaign attempted to follow fashions. Hair should be put up under a cap, with most of the volume on top (not at the back) of the head. Some hair should show above the forehead, and this hair may have some volume to it. Dressing hair with pomade and minimal powder is encouraged.

Acceptable: Hair pulled back or pinned up on top of the head and covered with a cap.

Unacceptable: Hair worn in a bun at the back of the head. Hair down, or left completely undressed. Large, elaborate high fashion styles.
**Hat/head covering**

Best: Flat, shallow-crowned straw or fabric covered hats with a diameter no more than 18” with the brim left flat, or slightly shaped. Black silk bonnets with brim and gathered crown.

Acceptable: Bonnets of other materials, such as white or colored silk, or checked material.

Unacceptable: Hats folded down over the ears. Straw hats with rounded modern crowns.

![Image of person wearing hat](image1)

**Outerwear**

Best: Wool cloak, commonly in red but also in colors such as drab and blue, closed with ties. Most images of cloaks show them being mid-calf- to waist-length. Linen, leather, silk, or worsted mitts

Unacceptable: Celtic-style or fantasy cloaks. Cloaks closing with decorative metal clasps.

**Stockings**

Best: White, blue, or natural colored back-seam stockings of linen thread, wool yarn, or worsted, ending above the knee. Stockings should be held up with leather or cloth tape garters tied above or below the knee.

Acceptable: White, blue, natural, or colored stockings of wool yarn, worsted, linen or cotton.

Unacceptable: Red or yellow stocking. Striped stockings, polyester stockings, athletic socks, modern tights. Though stockings with decorative “clocks” were occasionally worn in the period, few modern reproductions are accurate.
Shoes

Best: Reproduction high-heeled shoes with buckles, with fabric exterior, especially hardwearing worsteds.

Acceptable: Reproduction black, brown or red leather heeled shoes with buckles or low-heeled shoes with buckles; mules; low-heeled leather shoes with buckles or ties.

Unacceptable: Modern shoes.

Jewelry

Best: No jewelry, outside of officer’s wives impressions.

Acceptable: Small period earrings, non-obtrusive studs in non-earlobe piercings.

Unacceptable: Obvious modern jewelry, especially in any non-earlobe piercings

**Transporting Goods and Personal Items:**

Best: Pockets (hidden), market wallets, or nothing.

Unacceptable: Haversacks, modern baskets.

Blankets

Best: 2-3 Point checked, Dutch, or Rose blankets.

Acceptable: No Blanket, or shared blanket.

Discouraged: Hudson Bay blankets.

Unacceptable: Civil War grey blankets.
Cookwear & Eating Utensils

Early on in the campaign Francis’ men were deficient of cooking equipment. However, General Gates assured the Massachusetts soldiers of their compliment of cooking vessels on their arrival at Ticonderoga. From Albany on May 17th 1777 Gates informed Colonel Leonard of Massachusetts that “Iron potts, or Camp Kettles, which you tell me are in so much request, … shall be ready to supply the Necessary Number, upon the Arrival.”

Best: Cast iron camp kettles or tinned iron camp kettles, wooden bowls, pewter or horn spoons.

Unacceptable: Modern cook-wear.

Camping and Bedding

Colonel Ebenezer Francis wrote to his wife on May 2, 1777 telling her that “we live in the old Barracks”. They remained there until June 22nd 1777 when Greenleaf recorded in his journal that the Regiment “Reed order to Move out of Barracks Into tents.” Neat, clean, and healthy barracks rooms were regularly inspected by a “barracks master” as stated in General Orders from Albany in January of 1777. Participants are recommended to sleep within the reconstructed barracks of the fort. Bunks will be arranged to accommodate a mess of 5-8 persons. Bunks, mattress ticks, and straw will be provided on a first come first serve basis.

Best: Inside soldier’s barracks of the Fort, 5-8 persons to a bunk with straw-filled, hand-made mattress ticks, or mattress ticks organized on the floor. Inside soldier’s huts with mattress ticks organized on the floor.
Acceptable: Linen or canvas soldier’s tents.

Discouraged: Marquees and dining flies.
Appendix B: Recommended Reading
Bibliography


We Will All Be Phony Colonies

by Nicole Belolan

Created in the 1870s or ’80s, the tintype below depicts three women dressed in what was supposed to be Revolutionary-era styled costume (circa 1776-1781). The woman at left appears to be toting a Berlin wool workbag. Berlin work did not become popular in America until the 1840s, long after it would have been stylish for women to don short gowns or petticoats. What silly women, I thought. I dismissed them as sad examples of women playing colonial dress up. No one really ever wore kerchiefs or shawls like that. These women got it all wrong. They certainly weren’t good historians, I thought, if they were using anachronistic accessories.

But then I looked deeper. Clearly their costumes were a nod to the Revolutionary Era—and more likely than not taken during the years surrounding Centennial celebrations in 1876. These women, and many like them, donned similar Revolutionary-era costume in the final decades of the nineteenth century to celebrate and get in touch with their country’s past. They might be "phony colonies" (rhymes with “ponies”), a label my partner and I half-jokingly use for people dressed in non-historically accurate ways. We use it similarly to the way living history folks use the term “farb” to refer to an interpreter or reenactor who does not dress authentically. (Editor’s note: “Farb” is often translated as “Far be it for me to say whether or not it is accurate.”)

But who am I to judge my "colonies"? This might have been the closest they got to experiencing early America. We’ll never know for certain the stories behind their sartorial choices or how they related to each other, but we can imagine them.

Perhaps they were sisters dressed in a few remaining pieces of their great-great grandmothers’ wardrobes. Or, maybe they were dressed in items from a variety of sources for a Revolutionary Era-themed play. Whatever the story was, it probably got them reminiscing about their ancestors and the history they experienced.

Who am I, a historian and museum professional, to argue about Americans’ enthusiasm for history, however flawed from the perspective of a material culture scholar? I bring up my "phony colonies" because I think it’s easy for historians who don’t normally engage with living history to dismiss costumed interpreters as worthless when it comes to learning about the past. They probably think that the best history is the history that they, rather than “amateur” historians dressed in funny outfits, shape for their university lectures. I even heard of one historian who refused to visit the place, let alone interpreters.
portraying the historic people, that their students were studying. The professor feared it would change the students and their own interpretation of the place, people and history.

But my experiences as a material culture scholar who is sympathetic to, supportive of, and a bit jealous of the costumed living history crowd suggest the opposite. When I have engaged with costumed interpreters, I gained new insights into the past. Isn’t that what all historians desire for their students and publics?

Costumed interpreters invite deep engagement with the past. This is something one simply cannot get from sitting in a room listening to a lecture. For example, last year I paid a visit to the George Wythe House at Colonial Williamsburg. And guess what? George was at home.

When we reached Wythe’s study, there he was. Or rather, there was a costumed, first-person interpreter talking to me about Wythe’s life. Wythe was a prominent Virginian patriot who signed the Declaration of Independence and trained prospective lawyers, including Thomas Jefferson. I was a bit starstruck, even though I hadn’t known about Wythe until encountering him at home at Colonial Williamsburg.

Despite this, I did manage to work up the courage to inquire about Jefferson. I knew something already about Jefferson the statesman and gentleman architect. This guy knew Jefferson as a young whippersnapper. “Was he a good student?” I asked. I wanted to learn more about Jefferson-in-training, and I trusted that Wythe, or rather, the skilled interpreter before me, would provide a reasonably accurate answer. And isn’t that the point, to ask new questions about the past?

Interactions with such interpreters also inspire pure excitement and enthusiasm. I experienced this at a recent symposium at George Washington’s Mount Vernon, where I had the opportunity to “take hands with” and “have my portrait taken” with Lady Washington. As you may be able to detect from my smile, I was ecstatic. I had just spent two days getting the lowdown on the latest scholarship about Martha “Patsy” Washington and her contemporaries. And now I enjoyed the breeze with her from her piazza overlooking the Potomac River.

After I got over another brush with greatness, we had a lengthy conversation. Our discourse ranged from her favorite drink (brandy) to her relationship advice (“marry your best friend”) to infirmity and aging (pregnancy often took a toll on women’s bodies).

But costumed interpreters do more than inspire historical empathy, excitement, and curiosity from their visitors. At least for me, they invigorate my research and spur me to consider how I can bring what I am uncovering to the attention of the general public. When I go to a site featuring costumed interpreters, I think a good bit about what’s not there: dirt, a lot of animals, the sounds of carts hauling furniture across town, and who is not being represented. In my case, I think a lot about the absence of people with disabilities, the subject of my dissertation.

There many good reasons for these interpretive voids, and I don’t mean to scold any site for omissions along these lines. Rather, I’m saying that if I didn’t encounter costumed interpreters as a historian-visitor, I wouldn’t have a chance to think more about how I can fill in some of these blanks and bring this history to the public’s attention. I can choose to do that through a
journal article or an exhibition, or in collaboration with living historians.

Just as I dismissed my "phony colonies", many historians dismiss costumed interpreters because of what’s missing or what’s seemingly misunderstood. But really, historians need living historians and living historians need history scholars. We are all on the same team. And in fifty years, we’ll all be called "phony colonies" too.

About the Author

Nicole Belolan is a believer in living history and a Ph.D. candidate in the History of American Civilization at the University of Delaware. Her dissertation-in-progress is called "Navigating the World: The Material Culture of Physical Mobility Impairment in the Early American North, 1728-1861." She thanks Tyler Putman for inviting her to submit an essay for this issue and Samantha Bullat-McCarty for consulting about the tintype published here.

Resource Reviews

ISBN: 978-0-87020-724-2; Hardcover: $34.95 USD; 336 pages, bibliography, maps, photographs, illustrations.

Reviewed by Deb Arenz

Prior to being asked to review this book I had spent a total of two days in Wisconsin (in a conference room) and my general knowledge of the state was limited to cheese, the Green Bay Packers, and Wisconsin’s proximity to the mitten state. Even given my interest in agriculture, I was hesitant to review a book on Wisconsin agricultural history—especially since the author’s prodigious use of photographs and sidebars led me to mistake it for a textbook. Luckily for me, I got over my reservations. This is a great book.

This is not a textbook, yet the elements that give it a textbook feel add to its readability. The author, Jerry Apps, is eminently qualified: farm boy; former extension agent and professor in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; historian; award-winning author; and the host of numerous Wisconsin public television programs on agricultural topics.

The subject is broad. The book’s inside cover lists such topics as the influence of landscape and weather, settlement patterns, technology, agricultural research and education, government relations and policies, aquaculture, urban farming, food safety, and sustainability and climate change. Apps does a fine job arranging the broad topics into manageable chunks. The book reads chronologically and is arranged in five sections with twenty-four short chapters. There are descriptive chapter titles, such as Early Days of Milk and Cheese Production; Cranberries; and Farming at Midcentury. The writing flows well, with logical transitions from chapter to chapter.

Statistical information is frequent, but used judiciously to convey how agriculture has changed over time. The text is broken up and brought to life by the liberal use of appropriate, intriguing images from the collection of the Wisconsin Historical Society, firsthand accounts and reminiscences. Apps outlines the evolution of Wisconsin agriculture as a series of related events and shows how they are connected to regional and national issues.

Apps also describes how non-agricultural endeavors such as fur trading, lead mining, war, and technology affected agricultural practices either immediately or in the long term. This reinforces an idea that I’ve long held, that agricultural history is everywhere, if you only look for the connections.
We have all visited a historic site and witnessed costumed interpreters, sometimes site staff, sometimes volunteers, interpreting inside historic buildings or period room settings. Many sites also work with reenactors to bring life to their historic buildings for special events or programming. Often, reenactors inhabit a building as if they literally moved in for the weekend, and frequently they have. How does a reenactment group develop a trust relationship with a museum so they not only interpret the buildings, but move in, cook, sit on the (hopefully reproduction) furniture and stay overnight, sometimes for days at a time? How do they get “in”? Where do they start?

I have been on both sides of this trust relationship many times, both as the site director and as the event coordinator for my living history group, the Augusta County Militia. This technique has worked for my group at several locations, all of which have asked us to come back, whenever we wish to, and is designed to benefit both parties. Reenactors want to be in beautiful, pristine, amazing historic sites and buildings to get closer to the elusive “period moment.” Many site directors want their buildings to speak to their visitors’ common experience with the past in a way they cannot while empty and unpeopled.

1. Approach the Site

First, establish a relationship with the site director or director of interpretation several months to a year in advance of when you would like to provide a program. Once won over, this is the person who will go to bat for you with the site’s board, commission or other governing body. Be clear about goals for both your group and for the site. Try to offer the site a service that they would not otherwise be able to enjoy or afford: the “hook.” If possible, introduce yourself when visiting the site, at a meeting or at a conference. In person is best; then follow up on your initial contact by phone or email if you have already broached the subject of working together on a program. If you have a museum professional within your group (i.e. you) make it known. Many sites have had unsatisfactory experiences with reenactors and you may need to repair the damage on behalf of your hobby. Be prepared to do so, and to stake your professional reputation on your group’s performance.

Example:
In 1999, my group created a specialized interpretation not typically represented at a large military reenactment to lend greater depth to the event. Our camp generated considerable interest within the reenactment community, and the site director came to see us based on reports he’d received. Two years later, working with the group member who had researched and led the first interpretation, I led a more site-specific interpretation within another large military reenactment in and around one of the site’s historic buildings. Our interpretation was again part of a larger reenactment event but addressed non-military topics related to it and to the site, and this appealed to the director.

2. Follow-up in Writing

If the initial contact is positive and your group has already indicated interest then set up a potential date and time for a program.

Example:
Hi Tim,
I just received your voice mail this morning. I had called to touch base with you about possibly doing an interpretation in the log house for your May encampment. We received a flyer for the event at the Revolutionary War Reenactors annual meeting this spring and of
course the group is always interested in doing something at the Homestead. In fact it was unanimous at our annual meeting that I contact you to see about coming back.

We will once again present you with an interpretive plan geared to fit into the overall theme of the event but specific to the house and region. There is universal interest in baking bread and other goods, and the guys would be happy to do any fence or structure building/repair, farm chores or other period interpretive activities you would like to accomplish. We expect to have 15+ participants; usually 10-12 men and three women.

If the house is not available, we understand, but please let us know if there is another avenue for interpretation. We are planning on coming to the event regardless, but would rather do something useful for the site (and challenging and fun for us) than just be part of the standard dog and pony show.

Looking forward to hearing from you —

Carrie

3. Present an Interpretive Plan

Present an interpretive plan in writing to your contact for the pertinent dates of the program. This should also be made available to your group in a slightly more detailed format, with reading assignments. Be specific with your contact about who will be in charge (you). Keep him informed of how many participants there will be, what they will be doing, whom they will portray and where they will sleep. Several times now I have promised a group of 15 to 20 participants, and the excitement over the amazing historic integrity of the site has swelled our usual numbers to 30 or more, necessitating a call to my contact to see if he was amenable, or if I needed to clamp down on my group in a first-come, first-served commitment format. Tell your contact if you will need special accommodations such as an exterior cooking fire, tripod or firewood, if you wish to use any outbuildings not normally open to the public or if you need the site to provide materials for any interpretive activities (sheep for shearing, rails to be split, etc.). Sometimes these rather odd requests are met with exuberance, sometimes not. Be flexible. An understaffed site is often grateful to have a group fetch their own firewood from the pile behind the maintenance building and may gladly provide logs for the axe-skilled arborists in my group to split into rails for a section of new fence or repairs to an old one.

Example:
Setting: Beautiful Valley, mid-1770s.
Premise: The householders are a representative Valley family facing the impact of war. The Backcountry Militia Company will be on its way east to respond to the call for militias to supplement Washington’s army. The Captain has a familial relationship with the residents and will use such to gain permission to camp, provision and rest his men before joining the main army. In turn, the militia will be asked by the family to turn their hands to tasks (rail splitting, possibly farm chores) usually done by the men who have left to join the army. The militia company will drill and maintain a military demeanor while present on the farm.

It is a time of increasing tension as loyalties are declared or rescinded; neighbors can no longer be trusted and the smallest slights, recent or long past, are brought forward and examined again in an atmosphere of political divisiveness. Friendly County was by no means united in support of the Patriot Cause; neither were they staunchly Loyalist. Many rural farmers simply wanted to be left alone and tried to maintain a normal routine.

With news of the latest military action, the residents of the area continue their daily tasks. Food preparation, including baking in the detached oven, occupies the women’s time. The kitchen garden is recently planted and seeds must be cultivated and watered. The indentured servant woman carries water, cleans, and helps with the cooking. The men from this and neighboring farms (those who have not already joined the army) are thinking of going off, now that the fields are planted. Neighbors drop by to discuss the latest news.

There will be ample opportunity for family members and militia members to interact, sometimes positively, sometimes not. We will provide at least two skilled (professional) interpreters who will be
able to interpret the house’s actual history and introduce our interpretation for visitors, but others may be asked to take their turn for a couple of hours during the weekend.

Interpretive goals:
- Put a face on the people, particularly families, affected by the war
- Demonstrate the tenuousness of domestic life in wartime
- Explore relationships between master/servant in a small household
- Demonstrate conditions enjoyed by small militia units (compared to regular army)
- Discuss the reality of diverse political beliefs vs. the popular myth that “everyone was a patriot”

Let’s work together to create an outstanding interpretation and have fun at the same time!

4. Sell the Plan

Sell the plan. If you want to do something really interesting, which might be interpretively challenging, dangerous or at least something that would make the site’s risk management team get the shivers, explain exactly how it will work (Fig. 1). Be clear that your reenactment group has done this before, and that those involved have qualifications to complete the task safely and accurately. If you would like to provide site support in an interpretive way and split logs into fence rails, demonstrate that your group is qualified to do such work. For example, explain that your reenactor group includes two certified arborists, two historic site farmers and a historic restoration contractor, all of whom are skilled with edged hand tools. Provide references in writing. If you have a mission statement, provide it and other materials describing your organization’s activities. Offer to provide a copy of your group’s insurance policy. It is my experience that most reenacting groups do not provide a written interpretive plan to sites they approach. Just offering to provide a written plan and the curriculum vitae of the key members of your group may be enough to convince the site that you are serious about your interpretation and will conduct yourselves professionally. Provide images of your group at an event and offer them for the site’s use in program news releases.

5. On-Site Walkabout

If your contact does not do so, suggest an on-site meeting a week or two prior to the program to review the site together and go over site-specific details. Go over emergency protocols, learn where the fire extinguishers are kept and get emergency contact information for site staff, just in case (then be sure to share this information with key members of your group when they arrive for the program.)

Meet the support staff. Many a problem can be averted if the event organizer establishes a relationship with the site staff at this pre-program meeting. Learn their names. If you are using a site building and it is furnished, ask your contact if movable, fragile or valuable items may be packed away before your group arrives. If there is insufficient staff to accomplish this, and your group has members qualified to do so, offer to pack the furnishing collection away yourself. Keeping site items from commingling with members’ belongings ensures the safety of the site’s collection.

6. Keep Your People Informed

Create an email distribution or discussion list for your group, if you do not already have one. My group uses Yahoo Groups, and I use it to post files well in advance and update information quickly and easily. This way no one can claim they did not know that they were not allowed to shoot rabbits on site or put up tents next to the 1730s cabin. Current information is critical. Get

Fig. 1: Members of the Augusta County Militia take a break from notching logs at Historic Brattonsville in South Carolina. Photograph by Lisa Carrelli-Kraus and used with her permission.
commitments from your group members in writing, if possible, so you may plan numbers of attendees with reasonable accuracy and consult with site staff if the participant count changes.

7. Keep Your People Under Control

Even the best-laid plans can go awry if one of your group members gets out of hand. Be direct and clear in your planning materials what behavior is acceptable and what is not. Make it known in advance what will happen if someone flouts the standards of conduct. While the consequences may vary by event organizer within your group, it is best if the judgment is swift and tough, and delivered by the event organizer supported by the group leader or council. Knowing that they could be ousted from the finest event of the year should be enough to keep them on their best behavior.

8. Assign Roles

If possible, assign individual interpretive roles and/or tasks to group members (Fig. 2). They need not be in first-person, unless members of your group are skilled and qualified sufficiently to do so; in my group, the “Captain” does not represent an historical person, but our group leader has researched the subject and is knowledgeable about the role militia leaders played during the 1770s and 1780s; he interprets in third person. Ask talented interpreters to take prearranged shifts introducing the program or interpretation to the public so visitors will understand the vignettes they encounter. My group keeps a list of “friends of the unit” who are museum and history colleagues (including professional first-person interpreters) with whom we enjoy working for special programs and events (Fig. 3). Keep reenactors busy with interpretive chores and activities and they will not have time to talk about their favorite television show during open hours.

9. Check in With the Site

Your contact will probably stop in a couple of times during the program to see how you are doing. Be sure to take time to speak with him, provide updates and make any additional requests (We hate to ask, but if it keeps pouring, could some of the guys please sleep under the picnic shelter tonight?). If you are cooking something, be sure to save an uncut sample for the site director and make sure he gets it before you leave the site. Let him know when you are leaving, tell him about anything unusual or unplanned that happened and how you handled it, let him know which doors are closed/locked and that you put the fires out, that you replaced collections and furnishing items, etc. so he knows the status of the building. Offer to walk through it with him to be sure everything is as it should be, the way you found it.

10. Thank the Site

The day after the event, contact the site director by phone and personally thank him. Be sure to ask if everything was ok from his end, and if he got what he expected out of the experience. Discuss things that worked, things that did not and, if appropriate, discuss possibilities for the future. Send a thank you note in writing that day so he can share it with his board or governing body. If you have an
electronic discussion group, compile the positive feedback from your group’s members and pass it on to your contact.

The more you offer the site, the greater your chances of success will be. Put the site first. Working together with a historic site to generate high-quality living history programming for mutual benefit is immensely satisfying. Your reward could be an invitation to return, to spend more time in a wonderful period atmosphere, doing what you love (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Members of the Augusta County Militia during a pre-program meeting at Historic Hanna’s Town, Hempfield Township, Pennsylvania. Photograph by author.
“I Thought You’d Be Pretty:”
Interpretation and Disruption in Historic House Museums

by Kirsten Hammerstrom

Costumed interpreters working as servants, trades people and the laboring classes in historic house museums create opportunities to disrupt visitor expectations constructed from movies or museums that emphasize the pristine and beautiful over the messy and accurate. If interpretation’s aim is not instruction but provocation, costumed interpreters can serve as the source of both provocation and instruction.¹

David Peterson complained in 1988 that “living history excels at quickly illustrating a simple topic, and not all topics are amenable to these restrictions,” and that the urgency with which interpreters and living history practitioners argue their authentic costuming missed the point: “there is much more to history than meets the eye.”² Costumed events can bring the hidden history of the work of a house into the visitor’s view, even within a traditional “historic house museum” context. Indeed, costumed interpretation can be a first step toward expanded interpretation that more fully reveals the working and living history of a house, its occupants, and their community.

Visitors and docents can be taken aback by presentations of servants and labor, even in a Downton Abbey-saturated culture. The first time I wore historic costume in the John Brown House Museum (JBHM) where I work, one of our docents commented, “I guess ladies were more comely in Williamsburg than in New England.” A few months later, I was an interpreter at a local 1799 farm, when a visitor walked in and said, “Oh… I thought you’d be pretty, like the Jane Austen ladies on the BBC.” Even on the farm, visitors’ expectations were created less by historic sources or immediate context, and more by what they had seen before—on television.

These reactions to presentations of the ordinary and necessary coincided with, and helped inform, the development of living history events at several Federal mansions in Rhode Island. The first of these was Spring Cleaning in April 2012, when Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS) collections staff members spent a day cleaning the JBHM using eighteenth-century techniques while dressed in historic costume. Visitors were interested in our appearance as well as the cleaning methods (if a little hesitant to try them out), but we counted the day a success in helping our audience recognize the work required to maintain the lifestyles of the early Federal rich and famous.

After this, the RIHS developed an annual living history event, What Cheer Day, set in October 1800.³ During this event, costumed interpreters portray family members and servants of the Browns of Providence, one of the wealthiest families in early Federal Rhode Island. Census information provides the age, race, and gender of the people living in the house in 1800. Comparing this data to family letters and diaries, we believe the Browns had five servants.
living in the house, and costumed interpreters portray four of those five people.

It’s important to us to represent the work required to maintain the Browns in their house with twelve rooms with fireplaces, basement kitchen, exterior wash house, summer kitchen, stable, woodshed and kitchen garden. Changes to the house made during the twentieth century included removal of the side servants’ and tradesmen’s entrance and stair, several out-buildings, and the basement kitchen. Subsequent preservation decisions capped chimneys and rendered fireplaces unusable. Thus, any living history event that aims to represent a century other than our own takes place in an altered and inescapably false setting. Still, we persevere, because we believe it’s important to present an interpretation that differs from the usual guided or audio tour that focuses on the Brown family without mentioning the people who maintained the house and the family’s comfort.

Dress differentiates Brown family members from servants through fabric selection and style choices. We recognize that although visitors may not distinguish different fabrics and what they represent, they can discern “nicer” clothes from working clothes. Brown family members, and their mantua maker, dress in clothing derived from late nineteenth-century watercolors and fashion plates. Servants dress in replicas of extant garments documented to the “lesser sorts” or inspired by Paul Sandby drawings. While differences in clothing set the tone, we also use space to differentiate between Brown family members and household staff members. Interpreters representing family members are most likely to be found in various rooms of the house. Interpreters representing servants and trades people occupy and move through the hallways, stairs and outdoor areas. This is positioning is fairly authentic to the original uses and population of the service and circulation spaces. Through them was transported food, laundry, clothing, and waste. It is interesting to note, however, that we represent the family members in the museum spaces, suggesting that they are as precious as the furniture we display behind a barrier on the typical house tour.

Does What Cheer Day succeed in representing servants and work? Interpreters and activities succeed in differentiating classes. But in our presentation, these are “bad,” not very industrious or trustworthy servants. And, the Browns are not well-equipped to employ and manage servants. It is impossible to replicate sketchily-documented relationship. In the absence of well-dramatized servant/master roles, we fail to truly replicate the divergent classes that lived in the JBHM even as we interrupt the typical interpretation and disrupt the nostalgia of tourists who “wish they could have lived then.”

At Whitehorne House, a Newport Restoration Foundation property that functions as a museum of Rhode Island furniture, a 2015 Newport Winter Festival special program presented the story of two maids, but only in the kitchen. The rest of the house remained a shrine to the craftsmen of Newport. Costumed interpretation here has evolved from 2010 and 2011’s Keeping Christmas with the Whitehorns with local college actresses portraying two Whitehorne daughters and delivering a script-driven presentation to 2015’s An Afternoon in 1820, with two costumed first-person interpreters interacting with visitors on a variety of topics.

The 2015 program was, for the interpreters, inspired in part by the messy circumstances of What Cheer Day that included laundry spilled on the floor; coats, cloaks and bonnets hung on furniture; maids occupied
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with the newspaper; and mending and millinery piled on a table stocked with winter foodstuffs and Mrs. Whitehorne’s own fruitied gingerbread for sampling.\(^6\) Representations of maids in 1820 Rhode Island were impossible to find. So, interpreters sought information from prints, drawings, and extant garments to develop two personas dressed to signal similar class level and different ages.

Once again, these were bad, unreliable maids, scheming to leave the Whitehorne’s employment to open a millinery shop in Newport similar to one the maids had operated in Salem.\(^7\) The interpreters conversed with visitors about the difficulty of travelling to Newport, a popular topic on a very snowy New England day. The costumed interpretation of 1820 allowed visitors to engage with history on a level they would not have otherwise enjoyed. They were able to personally connect with the past and challenge the formal furniture-based presentation of the house. Allowing visitors to engage in, and actively challenge, the history presented to them by asking deeper factual questions or engaging in debate about women’s rights, achieves the goal of interpretation as provocation in a way that standard house tours cannot.\(^8\)

Costumed interpretation is not the only way to achieve this level of visitor engagement, and not all visitors enjoy it. But costumed interpretation succeeds in historic house museums when it serves as a disruption, as an all-the-way, as-far-as-you-can-take-it interpretation derived from themes and tactics outlined by Franklin Vagnone in *An Anarchist’s Guide to Historic House Museums*. \(^9\) What Cheer Day at the John Brown House, and to a lesser extent *An Afternoon in 1820*, use *Anarchist’s Guide* tactics of ending the passive tour, decentralizing experience, killing silence, and embracing simultaneity and gossip to inform program flow and content and the research underpinning the programs.\(^9\) Costumed interpretation that occupies a house or a space in a house demands a different kind of experience, ignores the standard house tour, and provides a more holistic visitor experience, even as it remains artificial in a house without working fireplaces.

Representing work in the great houses of Rhode Island’s Federal merchants is difficult at best. Staff and interpreters need to conform to museum collections management standards, the temporal nature of the programs, and the overwhelming aesthetic of the houses and their furnishings. And, perhaps the most important factor is the museums’ need to please visitors with a positive experience—a criticism of living history leveled by David Peterson in 1988.\(^10\)

By hesitating to challenge visitor expectations, the museum risks the continued presentation of a sterile vision of the past in mahogany mausoleums that fails to enliven houses and ignores the work required to maintain a house in 1800 or 1820. The reward of connecting people to the past is far greater than the risk of the portraying little-known historical characters and possible inauthentic relationships.\(^9\)

Endnotes

4. The house is heated and by a geothermal system installed in 2010 that makes use of early twentieth-century ducts.
6. See "Risky Business: What Cheer Day Case Study" for a description of messing up the historic JBHM.
8. Donahue, 10, citing Freeman Tilden, “the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction but provocation.”


About the Author

Kirsten Hammerstrom lives in New England, where she interprets the past in a variety of period costumes, and writes about the experience at www.kittycalash.com.

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Creating a Toolkit for Hosting Reenactments, Living History Timelines, and Other Reenactor Events at Your Site

Summary by Deb Fuller
Independent Living Historian, Alexandria, Virginia
(with Deb Friedman, Joyce Henry, Gary N. Costello and Melanie Diaz)

Hosting reenactor events at your site can be both exciting and terrifying at the same time. On the one hand, big events can be a huge draw to your site and gain you many new visitors. On the other hand, any time the public interacts with your site in large numbers, there is the potential for accidents or other newsworthy incidents. Lastly, there is also the fear that after all of your hard work and planning, no one shows up for the event. This panel (including Deb Friedman, Joyce Henry, Gary Costello, and Melanie Diaz) covered the basics of how to plan a large event such as a reenactment or a timeline event of living history units, how to market it, and how to keep it running smoothly so that both participants and visitors have a great experience.

First, I encourage you to read the excellent article The British Are Coming and So Are the Guests by Jim O'Brien in the Fall 2013 ALHFAM Bulletin. He does an excellent job of covering many of the issues of hosting a large battle reenactment, specifically a Revolutionary War reenactment hosted annually at Old Sturbridge Village that fields around 1000 participants. Issues covered in the article include planning, paperwork, working with reenactment units and commanders, registration packets, site logistics, scheduling, and lessons learned. I should note that O’Brien’s article mentions ordering hay. You will actually want to order straw bales if reenactors request them. Hay is food for livestock and is vastly more expensive than straw. Straw is the left-over stalks from harvested grains and is essentially inedible by livestock. It is used for bedding, soaking up water, and sitting upon at reenactment sites. Most sites will not be hosting events of that magnitude but the planning and logistics are basically the same. Since many of the issues that we covered in our panel are covered in Jim O’Brien’s article, I am going to focus on other issues that we discussed which are not covered in the article.

Planning

First, when planning a special event, it is critical to clearly define the event and its purpose. Battle reenactments are the most common events and probably the ones with which the public is most familiar. Other common events are hands-on history days, harvest festivals, timeline events, farm days, or market days. Be creative and don’t be afraid to try something different. Ask your volunteers and local reenactors what kinds of events they would like to do. They might have creative ideas such as a spinning frolic, a tavern night, or a WWII era victory garden and canning day. They will also know when the big era-specific events are so you can avoid planning your events around those weekends. For example, if you are a site near Old Sturbridge Village, planning a Colonial era event on or close to their “Redcoats and Rebels” event the first weekend in August would be a bad idea.

Events usually include programming such as weapon demonstrations, fashion shows, or tours of the site. Again, reenactor participants and site volunteers should be included in the planning process. Make sure event programming relates to the event’s theme and is adequately staffed. Activity stations such as period games for children are a great idea but you need to be sure you have enough volunteers to staff them throughout the day. A good event is a balance of programming and open time for visitors to wander around and tour the site. Volunteers also need down time during the day as it is exhausting to be “on” all the time, so be mindful of not planning out every hour of the day. Another critical factor is to leave time for the volunteers and reenactors to have lunch. I usually schedule site tours around noon or 1pm so that the reenactors can get a bit of a break and grab something to eat. Then I schedule the big battle reenactment or big demonstration after lunch to give everyone time to get ready and organized.

Another decision to make during planning is whether or not to include vendors such as period
sutlers/merchants and food vendors. Sutlers don’t just sell to the public, they also sell to reenactors. For larger events, it is good to have at least one or two sutlers who sell a mix of goods aimed at both the public and reenactors. Again, ask your participants who they recommend. I also talk to my vendors and explain the event so they know what to expect. If you run a publically funded site, make sure you abide by your local regulations for selling on public property. If vendors need tax IDs and a business license, make sure the vendors have this in advance so you can fill out the requisite paperwork for your organization. Also decide if you are going to charge a vending fee and how much it will be. For smaller events, most sites don’t charge unless it is a site regulation.

You will also need to decide if you are going to provide food for the public. Selling bottled water and packaged snacks can be done by volunteers or out of the gift shop. Selling cooked food usually involves a special permit or a catering license. Even scout troops selling hot dogs have to get a temporary catering permit. Bringing in a food truck is an option and you can have the truck there just during lunch hours. Small events can get by with snacks and bottled water. For larger events where you expect the public to stay all day long, it’s a good idea to have a more substantial food option on site as you don’t want to make the public leave and come back if they get hungry.

Trash and trash pick-up should be in your planning. Can your site’s trash cans handle the increased numbers of visitors or will you have to put out extra ones? Plan to have staff check trash cans during the event so that they do not fill up and overflow. Reenactors should police their own camps and keep them neat and free of trash, especially if they are camping out. Many units burn food waste in the fire or have a period bucket that serves as the trash bucket. Let them know where they can dump their trash.

For first-time events, it’s a good idea to start small and test the waters. Don’t host a big battle reenactment. Invite one or two units and have an encampment on the lawn. Instead of a big harvest festival, have a small hands-on history day with several activity stations. This will allow you and your staff to get an idea of what your site can handle for an event in terms of space and logistics. Even small events can be a lot of work and you don’t want to over-extend yourself, your staff and your site for your first event. You can build up on the next event and grow the numbers of participants and programming.

You will need at least six months to a year to plan an event. This gives you time to contact participants, gather all of your paperwork, and do marketing. Smaller events can be planned in less time. For larger events, the more lead time the better as many units set their schedules early in the year. Be mindful of your own site’s regulations and policy. If you are a public site and have to coordinate with other local agencies such as parks and recreation or the police department, you will need even more time to plan.

Fees and Payments

Charging units to participate in an event is a touchy subject. Some units, such as Civil War units, are used to paying a fee for reenactments, especially large events. The fees go towards the cost of hosting the event and upkeep of the site. For example, reenactments at well-known historic Civil War battlefields usually charge a fee for units because they draw anywhere from hundreds to tens of thousands of participants and don’t charge admission to the public. The unit fee is essentially a “pay to play” obligation for reenactors.

For smaller events, especially where there is an admission charge for the public, reenactors do not expect to pay a fee. In fact, many units will resent paying a fee if the public is charged. The reason is that they see themselves as the “draw” and that the admission charge should cover the cost of running the event. For the most part, this is fair. You should price your admission, if you charge it, so that it will help pay for the event. That being said, reenactors know that events are getting more expensive to run and museum budgets are tight. If you are finding that it is hard to justify the cost of an event, ask the units to help out. Many of them have connections with the local community and are willing to pitch in or donate towards the cost of port-a-potties, straw, water tanks, or other site costs.

On the other hand, artillery (cannons) and cavalry units may expect compensation as their costs are higher. Ask those units what payment they expect from your site for events. If you can’t pay the full amount, see if you can work
out a deal with them. Most understand and will help you out.

If you can afford to reimburse units for their gas or pay a small honorarium for attending an event, it is always appreciated. Other forms of compensation can be free passes to your site for a future visit or discounts at the gift shop. Do not give them payment until the end of the event. Also set a standard for payment or a minimum amount of participation so that units don’t bail on you and take the gas money or promise more people than actually participate.

**Marketing**

Every event director’s worst fear is planning an event and having no visitors attend. With good marketing, this should not happen. Traditional marketing through the local newspaper, public service announcements (PSAs) on the radio, and fliers posted on public bulletin boards is a good place to start. Start marketing early, at least two months in advance as people’s schedules fill up fast these days.

Your marketing should include social media. If your site isn’t on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, get on them now. If you don’t know what these things are or don’t know how to use them, find someone who knows how to use them. They aren’t hard and are free. Good social media advertising doesn’t take up a lot of time and can be more effective than traditional print advertising, especially for reaching out to younger audiences.

Also look at sending out e-mails to local neighborhood listservs, school groups, day cares, mom’s groups, and other targeted special interests. Do an internet search for local groups that you might not know about and contact them about your event. Ask them to help spread the word. Again, it is free and you will reach more people than just print advertising.

**Insurance**

Insurance is an absolute necessity these days. You can’t have an event without site insurance. Check with your insurance carrier to see what kind of insurance you have, what your limits are, and EXACTLY what it covers. We cannot stress this enough. The last thing you need is someone getting injured on site and then learning that your policy is void because it doesn’t cover events with firearms or live animals. You might have to purchase event insurance if your policy does not include it. This could be a one-time event policy or an additional rider on your existing policy. You will have to discuss that with your agent.

When you talk to your insurance agent, be very specific about your event, the size, the type of people, and everything you plan to include – animals, reenactors with firearms and types of firearms or other weapons (muzzle-loading, black-powder, modern, cannon/artillery, pikes, swords, etc.), open fires, outdoor cooking, etc. Make sure you know exactly who is covered under your policy – is it anyone on your site or only official volunteers and staff and paid visitors? You need a policy in which everyone is covered, even random people who wander onto the site without paying or going through an official entry point as will happen. Also, make sure that your insurance limits reflect the maximum capacity of the site as well. There’s no use in having a policy that only covers 1000 people when your site can hold 2000. More is better. Never skimp on insurance.

Individual participating groups or units also need insurance. Make sure that you get a copy of their insurance policies when they register or do not let them participate. If small units or independent participants do not have insurance, see if you can cover them as volunteers. For example, typically civilians are not going to have their own insurance because it is too expensive and they don’t have firearms. If someone from the public trips over one of their cooking pots or crashes into their spinning wheel, they will need to be covered.

**Animals**

The public loves animals and they can add a lot to an event. Nevertheless, animals can be very dangerous to a public that isn’t used to them. Anyone who brings in animals needs to have them under control at all times. Display animals that are in pens or that are fenced should be fine but the public still needs to be watched when they are around any livestock. As the old saying goes, “All horses have 4 hooves and teeth so all horses kick and bite.” This goes for sheep, goats, pigs, cows, chickens, and other animals as well. Like people, animals need a break from being “on” all the time. If it is hot, they need shade and water. You will also need to remove manure to keep the flies down.
Cavalry units need to bring quiet horses that are used to people and gun/cannon fire. Those having charge of horses that seem “spooky,” restless, or irritable towards the public need to be asked to leave as such animals are a huge liability. This is where knowing your units and knowing your participants is key. If you have never hosted cavalry, ask around and get the reputation of the local units. Do not invite units that have a reputation of being unsafe or “yahoos.”

Cavalry on the field needs to be under control at all times and ride in a safe manner. No showing off, hand to hand combat, or other dangerous moves. Any field maneuvers need to be thoroughly planned out and rehearsed. Riders who have difficulty controlling their horses need to dismount and leave the field immediately, preferably escorted by another rider as horses are herd animals. Safety is always first and even well-trained horses can accidentally injure people by stomping at a fly or spooking at something completely new. Good horses can also have bad days and be cranky and irritable. A good owner will know their horse and remove it if it can’t handle the event.

Safety

Safety of participants, volunteers, and the public should be the top priority of any event. It is better to cancel an event because of safety reasons than to let an event go on and have an incident.

Site Safety

Before the event, do a thorough site check. Make sure the grass is mowed, any ankle-breaking holes or excessively muddy areas are clearly marked, and all trash and debris is cleared away. All fences, steps, pathways, and gates should be in good repair and fully functional or closed to the public. Entrances, exits, bathrooms, trash cans, and parking areas should be clearly marked. When you have everything set up, walk through your site and pretend that this is your first time visiting. Is everything clearly labeled? Can you find your way around? Is everything clean and free of debris? Do you have special accommodations for people who need them?

Firearm/Weapon Safety

If your event includes participants with firearms and/or other weapons, make sure you have a clear weapons policy in place. Put it in writing and have all participants sign it to acknowledge and accept its provisions. Many events have a firearms safety inspector on site to inspect weapons before people go onto the field for battle reenactments or weapons demonstrations. Other events require that all blanks/cartridges be kept in a central location until they are ready to be used. This keeps them out of the camps and away from the public. The National Park Service has an official policy for historic weapons and certifies safety personnel to oversee their events. These guidelines are an excellent reference located here: http://www.nps.gov/fopu/getinvolved/supportyourpark/upload/HW-Policies-FINAL-2006A.pdf.

Make sure that everyone has their weapons under their control at all times and does not let the public handle them. If you see anyone doing anything unsafe at any time, ask them to leave immediately.

Public Safety

You want the public to have fun but you also want them to be safe. Make sure that your site rules are either clearly posted or written up in the event program. Staff and volunteers need to keep an eye on the public to ensure that they aren’t wandering off into closed areas and that they’re keeping their hands off of anything that isn’t supposed to be handled. The vast majority of the public is well-meaning but they can get swept up in the excitement of the event, forget or be overly curious and want to explore a reenactor’s personal tent that is tied shut. Gently remind them that tents are the reenactor’s houses for the weekend and are private spaces.

Have contingency plans for the weather. In the summer, thunderstorms can pop up with little warning. If you are in an area where this happens, make sure someone checks the weather radar at least once an hour. If there is any red on the radar heading your way or thunderstorm warnings, get people off the grounds and into solid structures. Lightning, tent poles, musket barrels and hobnails do not mix.

If it is excessively hot, scale back your programming. No need for volunteers and reenactors in period clothing to also get period heat stroke. End early or switch times to avoid the heat of the day. Likewise, if it is excessively cold, modify your event as well. Make sure people hydrate and don’t over exert themselves.
Your site should have a first aid kit that is easily located. Depending on the size of the event, you might be required to have an EMT on site as well. It is a good idea to have at least one person on site who is trained in first aid and CPR. Reenactors will generally let you know if they have medical training as well. Know who they are in case something happens.

If your site is in a rural location or has a mailing address that is different from the street address, make sure all participants know how to give your site’s location to 9-1-1. This is especially important if participants are camping overnight without staff present. Print out fliers with this information and give it to everyone who is staying on site so first responders can find your site quickly in case of emergency. It is a good idea to tell them to come in silence if the public is present to keep the commotion at a minimum.

**After Action Reports**

When it is all over and everyone has had a little time to recover, get together with your staff and volunteers for an after action report. Critically look at your event and ask:

- What worked?
- What could we do better?
- What can we do without?
- Ideas for next year.

Ask your participants these questions as well. Always be willing to improve. If something went wrong, discuss it. Be candid but not mean-spirited. Running events can be incredibly stressful and sometimes it is just not possible to be everywhere at once, or staff can get easily distracted chatting with the public. We’re all human.

This might seem like a lot to digest but remember you are planning an event over many months. Set deadlines and checklists early and stick to them. Many hands make light work so delegate, delegate, delegate!

I have appended the registration form and guidelines that are parts of the “toolkit” for OSV’s “Redcoat’s and Rebels” event. After you get a few events under your belt, you’ll build up your own event “toolkit” and be planning them with ease.
Appendix 1: Event Timeline

1 Month
- Start promoting your event on social media and P3As
- Continue contacting and hosting media, other organizations and members
- Check in with coordinating agencies and volunteers

2 Months
- Send out press releases and P3As
- Get an initial headcount of participants
- Start planning programming

4 Months
- Send out registration and vendor contracts
- Contact local agencies (police, fire, etc.)
- Start government paperwork
- Contact local agencies (schools, parks, etc.)
- Set up communication and media plan

6 Months
- Do an initial site survey and plan any major repairs that need to be done before event

1 Year
- Decide on event type
- Set date
- Discuss programming and get event insurance
- Write up event plan and make checklists

Day Before
- Confirm reservations with port-a-johns, water tanks, and straw
- Continue social media advertising
- Print out release forms for participants
- Hold staff meeting to discuss event logistics and final details

Day After Event
- Return port-a-johns and water tanks
- Sleep!

Day After
- Register participants for the meeting before the public arrives
- Greet the public and run an awesome event!
Appendix 2:

REGISTRATION FORM

10th ANNUAL
“FROM REDCOATS TO REBELS”
OLD STURBRIDGE VILLAGE
August 2nd-4th, 2013

UNIT __________________________________________________________

E-MAIL _______________________________________________________

CONTACT PERSON_____________________________________________

CONTACT ADDRESS____________________________________________

CONTACT PERSON SIGNATURE*__________________________________
*By signing this I agree that our unit has been made aware of and agrees to abide by the Event Guidelines for Redcoats and Rebels 2012.

NUMBER OF TROOPS:

- Enlisted and NCO ________
- Musicians ________
- Medical ________
- Commissioned Officers ________
- Civilian Participants ________

Number Arriving Friday evening ______ Arriving Saturday morning _____

NUMBER AND SIZE OF TENTS: (Please indicate size of tents. Space is limited so please limit to minimum. Except for special pre-arranged cases kitchens will be limited to one tent per unit). Please list number and approximate size of tents below.

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Unit will require: Firewood _____ Hay _____

Please list all those attending on a separate (supplied) roster form and return with other forms. Information on this sheet will be considered final unless amended upon pre-approval of event staff.

Please return forms and insurance waivers by June 1, 2013 to:

Jim O’Brien
Coordinator of Special Events
Old Sturbridge Village
One Old Sturbridge Village Rd.
Sturbridge, MA. 01566

Email Proof of Insurance to jobrien@osv.org
Appendix 3:

Event Guidelines
Redcoats and Rebels Old Sturbridge Village
August 2, 3 & 4, 2013

By registering and participating in Redcoats and Rebels you are agreeing to observe these event guidelines.

Check in and set up
- Check-in and set-up will ONLY be between the hours 3:00-8:00 PM on Friday August 2, 2013 and 6:00 – 9:00 AM on Saturday August 3, 2013. Camp set-up will ONLY be permitted during these hours. Registration will also be open Sunday August 4 from 7:30- 9:30 AM for daytrippers.
- Private motor vehicles are not allowed in the historic Village before 5:15 PM on Friday. Please plan on transporting your gear in handcarts, which will be provided, if you arrive before 5:15 PM. (Camps will be ¼ to ½ mile from the parking area.) Vehicles will be allowed to drive in to unload after 5:15 PM. You are asked to unload and remove your vehicle as soon as possible as only a limited numbers of vehicle may be allowed into the Village at one time. All vehicles must be out of the historic area by 9:00 PM on Friday evening. Vehicles will be allowed into the village on Saturday after 6:00 AM for unloading and must be out of the historic village by 9:15 AM.
- The breakdown of camps may not commence until after 5:00 PM on Sunday August 4, and must be completed by 8:00 PM.
- Only historically authentic camping is permitted at Old Sturbridge Village. No modern camping is allowed. For those not wishing to camp in a historical manner, there are several public campgrounds and hotels in the immediate area. (Go to http://www.sturbridge.org/lodging.htm for details.)
- Vehicles must be parked in designated participant areas only. A parking pass given at registration must be visible on the dashboard on the left side of the steering wheel. Parking passes must be in place before a vehicle is allowed to enter the village for load in or load out. Parking pass must be legible from the outside. Owners of any vehicle that is left in a non-designated area will be asked to move it and could be subject to towing.

Hours and access
- We are open to the public from 9:30 AM until 5:00 PM daily and also open from 5:00-8:00 PM on Saturday evening for a Twilight Encampment. You should count on being available to the public during those hours. During the hours that we are open to the public please keep modern anachronisms out of sight and adhere to our clothing guidelines listed below.
- You are welcome to tour the museum exhibits and grounds during the hours when we are open to the public. For the safety of all, we ask you to please confine yourself to the camps or surrounding area at other times. Touring the museum exhibits or grounds "after hours" is prohibited.
- All entrance and egress of the Village grounds before 9:30 AM or after 5:00 P.M., must be through the gate at the Security office ONLY. Please check in and out with the Security officer on duty.

Safety and Emergencies
- In case of fire or medical emergencies, call 511 (NOT 911) from any Village phone, or contact our Security office for assistance.
- For non-emergency concerns after hours, contact the Security office in person or
at (508) 347-0273.

- For your own health, please drink plenty of water throughout the day, and rest as needed.

**Fire**

- Light fires only in approved locations.
- Leave no fire unattended, and extinguish fires thoroughly before departure.
- Units are encouraged to bring fire extinguishers to their campsites. Old Sturbridge Village will supply shared fire extinguishers and fire blankets to be placed in the vicinity of your campsite, and their locations identified.
- A full water bucket must be located next to your fire pit at all times.
- Firewood will be provided near your campsite. Please do not take firewood except from designated locations and do not cut any standing timber.

**Firearms**

- All weapons, both edged and firearms, shall be used and stored in a safe and deliberate manner at all times.
- For the safety of all, obey the commands of your unit’s officers and the Old Sturbridge Village safety staff or designee.
- Old Sturbridge Village endorses the safety guidelines put forth by the Continental Line and the British Brigade. These safety guidelines can be found online at www.continentalline.org/documents/regulations.pdf and at www.britishbrigade.org/archives/camps.html
- Firearms may ONLY be discharged at times and places designated by the event safety officer. Random firing or firing demonstrations are prohibited, and there shall be no gunfire in camps.
- ONLY weapons and cartridges inspected and passed by the event safety officer or designee may be fired.
- NO live ammunition should be brought to this event.
- In any mock battle, only powder shall be placed in firearms: no paper, no wadding, no ramming.
- You must be 16 years of age or older to carry a weapon.

**Historical Authenticity Considerations**

- Participants are expected to dress appropriately for a Revolutionary War Event. In keeping with the Old Sturbridge Village mission, impressions should be accurately portrayed and based on primary source documentation.
- In addition to your unit’s authenticity guidelines, it is recommended and encouraged that you also follow the following authenticity standards:
  - For both accuracy and fire safety reasons, garments made of all-natural fibers are highly recommended.
  - Civilian men are encouraged to wear a period correct coat, jacket or farmer’s smock at all times. Women are encouraged to wear a sleeved outer garment: a gown, jacket, bed gown, riding habit, or short gown.
  - Members of military and militia units are encouraged to wear their uniform coats especially while drilling, on parade, during arms inspection and at battle.
  - Petticoat breeches, often referred to as “slops”, were worn to protect one’s breeches in a work environment and are not appropriate for this event unless your impression is that of a ship’s crewman, dockworker, or rope maker and you are wearing them over a pair of breeches.
  - The use of role-appropriate methods of carrying personal belongings is encouraged. Haversacks were a military issued item in-
tended for carrying rations and should be worn only by men-at-arms portraying regular soldiers. The use of haversacks as general-purpose carry-alls by militia or civilians should be avoided. Civilian impressions are encouraged to use period correct baskets, knapsacks, market wallets, and work bags for carrying personal items.

- Footwear should be appropriate to the historical impression. Woman and children are encouraged to wear plain dark colored leather shoes. Gentleman wearing modern footwear for safety reasons should have them covered with well fitted gaiters or gaitered trousers. Sandals, Birkenstocks and sneakers are not appropriate in front of the public.

- Wearing of modern jewelry such as earrings, bracelets, rings (other than wedding rings) by both men and women is discouraged.

- Impressions based on movies or television are not appropriate for this event. “Do-rags”, sandals, coonskin caps, fringed buckskin, cut-off modern pants, drawstring caps, and sleeveless bodices are not appropriate or encouraged for this event.

- Historically a very few women did keep their true gender hidden and “pass” as men to serve in uniform. If a female participant chooses to do the same, she must strive to remain “undetected” and not advertise her femininity. Otherwise, one’s historic costume should correctly reflect one’s gender.

- Be considerate of our family audience; e.g. no ribald humor or profanity during open hours, and no prostitute impressions.

- No impressions of famous personages are allowed without prior written permission from Old Sturbridge Village.

- Only historically authentic camping is permitted at Old Sturbridge Village. Please keep all modern amenities such as coolers, plastic tarps, etc. well hidden during the hours when the museum is open (This includes the toys, electronic games, strollers, playpens etc. of any children in historic costume who may accompany you.)

- For the consideration of all, no radios, televisions, tape or CD players are permitted in the camps.

- **Cell phones if truly necessary, should be left turned off, or on "vibrate," and ONLY used out of the sight of the public.**

- Please refrain from using modern drinking containers such as paper coffee cups and water bottles in view of the public.

- **Old Sturbridge Village now allows smoking only in designated smoking areas.** Check your map for locations of smoking areas. During museum hours please confine smoking to historic-style pipes or cigars, no cigarettes.

- Please use restraint in the use of cameras and modern recording devices in view of the public.

### Alcohol and Drugs

- Drunkenness at any time is strictly prohibited.
- Possession or use of illegal drugs is strictly prohibited.
- **Old Sturbridge Village has a zero tolerance policy regarding under age drinking. It is the unit commanders responsibility to monitor his unit to guarantee compliance with this policy.**

- No alcoholic beverages may be open or consumed during hours the museum is open to the public.

- **Failure to adhere to these rules may result in immediate expulsion from the premises and/or arrest.**
Practical considerations

- Rest rooms are located in the Bullard Tavern and the Countryside Learning Center. There are portable toilets available as well. Please refer to the map given to you at registration for locations.
- Water from the pump on the Village Common is potable (Sturbridge town water). Potable water is also available at the Bullard Tavern, the Countryside Learning Center, spigots at the Fitch House and Fenno Barn, and "bubblers" throughout the grounds. Locations are marked on your map.
- Please use the designated trash receptacles at your campsite or located throughout the grounds.
- No pets or other animals are allowed in the Village.
- Smoking is permitted outdoors only in designated areas and is NOT permitted in any building. Please refer to the map given to you at registration for locations. As noted above during the hours we are open to the public please confine smoking to historic-style pipes or cigars: no cigarettes, please
- Any children under 16 years of age who may accompany you must be under adult supervision at all times.
- Keep your valuables safe. Old Sturbridge Village assumes no responsibility for the loss of any personal property or equipment.
- For the consideration of all, we ask that *lights out* and quiet be observed after midnight.

Food and other services

- Bullard Tavern: Cafeteria (lunch only)
  The Grill @ Parsonage Barn: serves snacks and soft drinks during museum hours
- Miner Grant Store: Serves coffee, cookies, muffins, candy, soft drinks during museum hours
- The Museum Gift Shop and New England Bookstore is open from 10:00 AM – 6:00 PM daily.
The Redcoats are Coming and So Are the Guests:  
Best Practices and Policies for Hosting Military Reenactments

by Jim O’Brien

In the constant struggle to increase visitation, historic sites are turning to special events as a way of enticing guests through the front gates. Such events benefit sites in several ways. They allow museums to create and customize individual press releases for each event, supplementing their paid advertising budget and giving the site greater exposure. Newspapers, periodicals and radio stations all want to tell the story of a catchy event.

Events encourage repeat site visitation and please frequent visitors and members. Special events generate income for the site, not only through increased attendance, but also through the increase in collateral gift shop and food service sales that result from admissions.

At Old Sturbridge Village (OSV), special programming is classified into two categories, special events and signature events. Signature events are larger offerings that take considerably more resources as well as staff and volunteer commitment and participation.

Our best-known signature event is the Redcoats & Rebels Revolutionary War Reenactment, held annually the first full weekend in August. Historically this event has provided two of the busiest days of the year at OSV. Much thought and work go into the planning of this unique, high-quality event. In 2013, OSV celebrated the tenth anniversary of Redcoats & Rebels, hosting almost 1,000 reenactors from more than 50 units. They began arriving early Friday morning; concentrated programming was planned for guests on Saturday and Sunday. Old Sturbridge Village was their new home until they departed when the museum closed at 5:00 PM Sunday. The Saturday and Sunday offerings drew just shy of 10,000 guests to the site, with 5,200 arriving Saturday and 4,600 visiting on Sunday.

Host Experts within Boundaries

To ensure a successful reenactment, events like Redcoats & Rebels need participant buy-in and commitment to the host site. Also, the host site’s name and reputation require positive publicity. Seeking assistance from trusted reenactment experts can help. For Redcoats & Rebels, OSV staff members identify host units for each side of the historical reenactment. American and Allied forces and British and Crown forces each have a principal unit on which the museum relies.

To select a trusted and effective host unit, get to know a dynamic organization with an organized commander. Such a host unit should hold the respect of other units and share a vision and agenda similar to those of the host site. With such connections established, it is easier to work with and delegate much of the event’s programming to these host units.
While a good working relationship with host commanders is important, host site staff must never relinquish final control of the event. Know who is participating in the reenactment. A site can control this by allowing groups to participate by invitation only. This way, the quality and creativity of the participating reenactors and their interest in sharing with the host site’s audiences can be assured.

American reenactment artillery unit prepares to fire another volley in the heat of the battle in the Freeman farm fields at Old Sturbridge Village. Photograph courtesy of Old Sturbridge Village.

At the OSV Redcoats & Rebels event, no unit is added to the invitation list until it is personally approved by the host unit. The selected host unit commanders have been on the field with reenactors at other events. From close contact, they know the good, the bad and ugly about each unit in the hobby.

After an invitation list is mutually developed, more detailed event planning can proceed. It may take most of a year to work with the host units in organization and planning to assure a safe, cohesive and high-quality presentation for the participants and the host site’s visitors.

Mind the Paperwork

Key to event planning is the anticipation of issues before the event and addressing them early in the process. Many issues can be averted by having clear rules and paperwork in place.

When formal invitations are sent to each unit’s contact, an information packet should accompany it. OSV staff accomplish this electronically with lots of attachments. Included are: a registration form, the event guidelines, a programming questionnaire, a unit roster form, and blank liability waivers to distribute among the unit’s members for signatures. Each unit is also informed that it is required to submit proof of an insurance policy to OSV. If the unit plans to bring cannon and other artillery, it is required to send copies of current operators’ licenses and cannon or artillery inspection records. The invitation includes a clear registration deadline. This date is selected so that all paperwork and necessary information is returned to OSV at least two full months before the event.

The OSV registration form has spaces for the full mailing address of the unit contact person and unit he represents. It also requests an accurate list of the participant numbers and an arrival date (Friday evening or Saturday morning). The form asks for details about how many officers, enlisted men, musicians, medical personnel or civilians are expected. Also, a precise accounting of the tentage, listed separately by tent types (A-frames, wall tents, marquees and flies), must be indicated. The unit contact signs the form to indicate that he and his unit have read and will comply with the OSV event guidelines. (Samples of the OSV Redcoats & Rebels Updated Guidelines and Registration Form 2013 for Redcoats and Rebels can be seen at the ALHFAM website, www.alhfam.org/Bulletin/Redcoats_Rebels_Updated_Guidelines_Reg_Form-2013.pdf.)

The event guidelines are perhaps the most important document that OSV distributes to reenactment participants. They clearly state museum expectations and policies for all participants. The multi-page document address issues of check-in and set-up times, policies, event hours and access stipulations, safety and emergency procedures, fire safety procedures, firearm safety procedures, historical authenticity considerations, alcohol and drug policies, practical considerations for participation, and information on participant amenities. OSV also expects more programming from participants than sitting around their camps and having a battle.
A programming questionnaire asks each unit to list and consider what unique presentations they are willing to offer our guests. Fashion shows, cooking and camp demonstrations, fencing demonstrations, interactive marching drills, and church call are all listed as examples. Units are encouraged to bring individual specialties to the event.

The roster form is a blank form on which units list members attending and guarantee that they are part of the unit and are covered under the insurance policy. There is a space for checking off when each of these individuals submits his or her personal release of liability to supplement the unit’s insurance.

As registrations are returned to OSV, an electronic file is created for each unit to hold their roster, registration information, proof of insurance, pertinent correspondence and individual liability waivers (which sometimes arrive later than the rest of the packet). Registration information and insurance are date-stamped. Keeping all of these files up-to-date is helpful when requesting any missing paperwork as the event draws near.

Making the Site Ready

OSV considers reenactment participants our guests for the weekend. The staff aims to make the participants feel welcome and comfortable. While we are busy working with the host units to coordinate the two days of event programming, there is much more to attend to. It is helpful to have an internal team work out site logistics and details. At Redcoats & Rebels, there is a full-time staff of managers who work as a team on a regular basis. For example, event planners meet with the agricultural manager to review which fields can be used for camping and battle demonstrations. Together, they strategically work out a plan that allows the site to use our fields agriculturally and still allows ample space for reenactment requirements. The agricultural manager and grounds staff then schedule designated field mowing and preparation for the reenactment weekend.

Reenactors expect certain amenities that make their time on the site more comfortable. Many request hay to sleep on. OSV staff set aside hay for special events. This is not necessarily first-quality feed hay needed for livestock care and programming. Water sources must be made available to the different camp areas. These sources are also masked from sight if they are not visually period-appropriate. Supplemental rest rooms are provided, including several hidden port-a-johns for participant use. We also leave modern rest rooms and facilities open after hours for their use.

Through the OSV food service, ice can be made and bagged for sale at a very reasonable cost to the camp cooks throughout the weekend. OSV staff members work closely with the town to let the local Health Department know our plans and arrangements for the event. They also secure all necessary cannon and firearms permits from local authorities. The facilities and grounds crews work hard to get firewood placed at all the campsites and to get running water lines there. Extra trash receptacles are placed throughout the grounds. The security department schedules extra staff to handle crowd control and parking issues. The merchandising group develops related promotions, including commemorative tee-shirts. All this work from a variety of departments helps ensure event success.

Registration packets are compiled in the weeks preceding Redcoats & Rebels. Unit contacts are electronically notified of any last updates and changes two weeks before the event.

The Date Arrives

If everything goes well, the planning with host units has the event well in hand. Two weeks before the event, OSV staff holds a final walk-through with host units and their chain of command. Field camping assignments are completed and final preparations are in place.

Quartermasters arrive early on the Friday morning of the event weekend and begin laying out the camp streets. They string lines and make certain there is room for all the tents based on the number listed on the registration forms. Registration opens mid-afternoon on Friday, and reenactors begin to arrive.
At the registration area in the parking lot, OSV staff set up two pop-up tents, one for each side of the reenactment. Each participant registers in the appropriate tent upon arrival. The participants receive a registration packet that includes an event ID that they must carry. This confirms that they are participating with a unit and guarantees that OSV has a signed liability release on file. No “walk-ons” are allowed as participants to the event. All participants must register with a unit.

During the check-in, participants also receive a packet with a full set of the guidelines (in case these were not shared by their commander), copies of any updates sent to the commander, site maps, detailed schedules for both days of the event, a parking pass and a complimentary admission to come back to the visit the site as a thank-you for participating.

Once they have completed the registration process, participants may hike in to their sites using portable garden carts that we provide. If they need vehicular access to their assigned sites, they wait until after 5:00 PM when the museum closes. The internal OSV team oversees registration as well as activities inside the museum. Staff members are located at key areas to help facilitate traffic and direct units to their sites.

A one-way traffic pattern with a separate entrance and exit is put in place within the historic site to avoid congestion. Museum staff members direct traffic at critical points, supplemented by sawhorses and directional signage. After unloading, participants must move their cars to a designated reenactor parking area. This ensures main parking lots are clear for guests.

Registration continues until very late on Friday night, although vehicle access is restricted after darkness, due to safety concerns. Participants are required to move vehicles out of the historic village as soon as possible, and no vehicles are allowed in the historic area overnight. At least one member of the management staff is on-site around the clock. There are also management staff members on call for emergencies. Twenty-four-hour security personnel are also on-site.

At the break of dawn, the site is re-opened for registration by those arriving on Saturday morning. Vehicle access for morning arrivals ends a half-hour before the site opens to the public. Several modern handcarts are available for reenactors to borrow.

When the museum gates open, crowds pour in to see the show! The day’s programming consists of a full complement of events that showcase military history, camp life, camp tours, artillery demonstrations, drilling, and the popular battles and skirmishes.

Saturday’s schedule includes extended visitation hours. Regular museum exhibits close at 5:00 PM and regular interpretive staff depart then. The museum grounds and encampments remain open until 8:00 PM. As another courtesy to participants, the museum allows them the use of our tavern for a “jolly” after we close our doors to the public. For many of them, this is the high point of the weekend. Museum management staff is on hand, but out of sight, to monitor the building and be of assistance, if needed.

Sunday morning registration reopens for any single-day participants and the show continues. After all is said and done, over the course of two
days, OSV has provided its visitors and reenactors with four battles, countless interactive program opportunities and a unique immersion experience into early New England that cannot be experienced elsewhere.

After the five o’clock closing on Sunday, the participants begin breaking down their sites. They are discouraged from beginning breakdown before closing time, and vehicles are not allowed into the historic site until fifteen minutes after the public closing time. Gear is stowed away and the happy weekend warriors go back to the twenty-first century with a wave, a smile and a promise to return next year.

Looking Toward Next Year

It’s hard to believe, but just a few short hours after load-out begins at 5:00 PM on Sunday afternoon, the site of OSV looks no worse for wear for its influx of participants and paying guests. It’s then time to wind down, evaluate and look ahead to the next time.

Over ten years of presenting Redcoats and Rebels, OSV staff members have learned certain things:

• No matter how careful one is in spelling out all the dos and don’ts of historical accuracy in your guidelines, a few participants will break the rules and minor modern anachronisms will find their way into the event.

• It is impossible to monitor 1,000 people 24/7 for three days and catch every little thing; ultimately, it is counterproductive to do so. Luckily, units self-police to help us keep the infractions to a minimum.

• One can never keep everyone happy. You can only do the best you can to appease everyone from the stitch counters to the moderates. But one must try, since both are very important to the success of the event.

• It’s up to museum staff to not be too strict or too lax and keep constant control of your event. I cannot stress enough that a moderate disposition on the part of the event organizer helps to ease the stress between these two groups and ensure a successful, high-quality event.

• It is important to keep control of the event and the museum site. Authenticity guidelines need to be specific and reasonable. It is my personal philosophy that it is not up to the site or the event to dictate controversial authenticity requirements. It is the participating unit’s responsibility to govern and police its own accuracy standards. The site can support these units by keeping the invitation list current with well-respected units. A rule of thumb I always follow is to not put any requirements into our guidelines that we wouldn’t expect of our own paid daily staff.

A Quality Site Can Assure a Quality Event

For units that might not be 100% up to the highest standards, the site should not be exclusionary but should instead be supportive in any way it can to help inspire that unit and give its members the tools to progress (short of throwing money at them: after all we’re mostly non-profits). This is a good way to give back to the hobby, since participants are allowing us to increase our attendance because of their involvement.

When all is said and done, we are all striving toward the same end: to share our love and passion for history with our guests and inspire them to want to return and immerse themselves in our past in the near future.

About the Author

Jim O’Brien has worked at Old Sturbridge Village since 1980, always connected with the costumed experience. His work there ranges from front-line interpretation to planning and organizing large-scale events and daily performance programs. Jim can be reached with questions at jobrien@osv.org. To see a video of Redcoats & Rebels, go to www.osv.org.
Risky Business: Living History Events in Traditional Museums

by Elizabeth Sulock and Kirsten Hammerstrom

Over the past two years, Rhode Island’s leading historical societies have independently launched new site- and time-specific living history programs designed to bring to life forgotten or overlooked aspects of the past. The Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS) presented “What Cheer Day,” based at the John Brown House Museum and intended to recreate a typical day in 1800. The Newport Historical Society (NHS)’s “Stamp Act Protest” (NSAP) used Washington Square and the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House as the site for a “pilot riot” commemorating the 1765 Stamp Act Riots. (Editor’s Note: More information on RIHS sites and programs may be found at www.rihs.org/about-us/. Information on NHS may be found at www.newporthistory.org/.)

The following case studies examine these events and their organization, training, successes and challenges. We intend to suggest ways that traditional historical organizations can use living history to revitalize interpretation and address difficult historical topics.

Innovating Our Past: A Review of the 2014 Newport Stamp Act Protest

by Elizabeth Sulock

The development of our first large-scale living history program, a reenactment of the 1765 Newport Stamp Act riots, represented another innovation. Lacking the resources of a larger museum made this a challenging endeavor. But we were committed to presenting a research-based program that illustrated both positive and negative aspects of historical events. Our experience in developing the Newport Stamp Act Protest (NSAP) may offer small museums some inspiration for creating similar events.

Inspiration

Prior to NSAP, our living history programming focused on my role as a costumed interpreter for tours, special events and school field trips. The field trip program, which highlighted colonists’ opposing viewpoints through an interactive hands-on method, was the inspiration behind NSAP. The approaching 250th anniversary of the Stamp Act Riots gave us an ideal opportunity to offer a pilot reenactment as an innovative form of public history based on our field trip experience.

The Newport Stamp Act Protest comprised two segments: a portrayal of colonial life, focused on craftspeople and discussions regarding underlying political issues, and the actual riot. Events were anchored at Washington Square, a modern park in downtown Newport, Rhode Island, which had been the town’s colonial center. Interpreters portrayed such tradespeople as a printer, tailor and milliner alongside loitering sailors, a fruit seller and leading citizens. A ladies’ tea and games for children were also offered.

Interpreters provided historical background when talking with visitors and offered opposing viewpoints. To recreate the riot, we condensed events of multiple days into select elements: the parading and hanging of a single effigy (rather than burning three effigies); the “pillaging” of our house museum; and a period confrontation as the program finale.
Challenges

While preparing NSAP, we addressed many practical considerations, including recruiting participants, utilizing public spaces, adapting historical events while maintaining accuracy and creating ways to offset costs. To recruit volunteer interpreters, we leveraged my reenacting network. We invited participants with a dedication to historical accuracy, and we asked friends to recruit friends. I utilized my experience of what worked well, and not so well, as a volunteer interpreter to craft a “user friendly” event that would offer wide appeal.

We scheduled NSAP to accommodate easy day trips from across Southern New England with a 10 a.m. beginning and a 5 p.m. conclusion. The morning portion featured a twenty-minute historical orientation and mini-tour. The public portion began at 1 p.m. To help participants prepare, and to ensure that the public was well-served, roles were assigned weeks in advance with accompanying reading materials. This approach was appreciated by the participants and crucial to the program’s success.

Other challenges related to weather concerns. Since everything would take place outdoors, safety concerns for a busy public setting had to be addressed. We secured the proper city permits and made arrangements for police and fire coverage. Fortunately, on event day the weather was dry and mild. We had no safety issues.

While securing approval from city officials, we were asked to refrain from naming the event the “Stamp Act Riot” and instead refer to the event as a “Protest.” As we prepared, we shared details with commercial businesses near Washington Square and with the Visitors Bureau. We endeavored to engage their support for the event, as it would increase foot traffic and promote Newport as a cultural heritage tourism destination.

We addressed concerns related to the effigy demonstrations in our modern setting. We were concerned that visitors might question the parading and hanging of an effigy, a central part of NSAP. Fortunately, we did not receive any complaints. In fact, during the following month, in a Providence Journal opinion piece, we received a public compliment about the inclusion of the effigy in the event. (See http://tinyurl.com/jdzovp9 and http://tinyurl.com/zwo2ed4.)

Although we were concerned that the public might not be able to suspend its disbelief for the creation of a “pop-up colonial city” amidst a busy commercial area, we discovered that people tolerated the venue’s modern surrounding. It made a difference that we were in the actual location where history had been made nearly 250 years ago. One reason for the program’s success was its location in a tourist destination. The event drew visitors who had learned about it through our marketing efforts, including visitors we would not normally see.

Because of the public venue, we presented NSAP free of charge. We were able to do so largely because of our team of talented volunteer interpreters. But we faced out-of-pocket expenses for permits, public safety details, catering and the like. We sold tickets to a fundraising after-party, where we served cheese and strong beer, just as rioters had been served in 1765. We engaged sponsors, including a brewery, a cheese company and a tea shop, all of whom donated items enjoyed alongside hors d’oeuvres and other drinks.
This revenue helped cover programming expenses and the event provided a celebratory conclusion to the day’s activities.

Suggestions for Presenting Living History Programs

Although NSAP required extensive planning, the innovative work behind this effort was worth it. Not only was it reviewed as “an unqualified success” in the Providence Journal, it also served as the initiative to launch our YouTube page and it encouraged other local institutions to develop living history projects. (See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfewlUckzvU and related posts.)

I believe that the NSAP offers a model for small museums with a limited staff and budget to develop living history programming that teaches important stories to the public in a tangible and interactive way without sacrificing commitment to historical accuracy.

There are several specific concepts from NSAP that are broadly applicable to other historic sites looking to develop a living history program:

- Use your location as inspiration and partner with like-minded organizations to share responsibilities and resources.
- Recruit participants by interviewing local reenacting groups to find interpreters whose goals align with your vision.
- Share advance research with participants.
- Emphasize historical themes that show diverse viewpoints and the unhappy side of history, to allow the public to better understand the past.
- Have fun and allow the public to have fun.
- Take chances and think about new ways to bring history to life!

Rhode Island Historical Society: “What Cheer Day” Case Study

by Kirsten Hammerstrom

Innovation

“What Cheer Day” began in 2012 as a Rhode Island Historical Society-wide initiative celebrating Rhode Island history with programs at all four sites, including lectures, a library open house and a living history event at the John Brown House Museum (JBHM) in Providence (see http://www.rihs.org/museums/john-brown-house/). In 2013, we shaped “What Cheer Day” into a living history event based on annual interpretive themes of the Historical Society.

The 2013 theme was Faith & Freedom, encompassing Rhode Island’s history of religious tolerance, evolving notions of freedom for women and Rhode Island’s role in the Atlantic slave trade. The theme resonated with the story of the youngest Brown daughter, Alice. Her out-of-wedlock pregnancy and marriage to James Brown Mason the day before the birth of their daughter Abby was discussed on house tours, but living history brought new drama to the story.

Interpreters also received information describing John Brown’s support of the slave trade despite fierce opposition from his brother Moses, a Quaker convert. Visitors were given a handout with information explaining the event and topic-driven icebreaker questions like, “Do you think the slave trade is immoral?” Initial plans called for semi-scripted vignettes, but creative time to write these was limited.²

These seemingly unrelated ideas inspired our final plan to occupy the JBHM, portraying a day in 1800
with an immersive, improvisational family drama. “What Cheer Day” (WCD) also employed tactics from the Anarchist’s Guide to Historic House Museums. Self-guided and unscripted, visitors customized their WCD experience. The simultaneous events required visitors to move through the house to understand both action and characters.

Rhode Island Landscapes and Seascapes was the RIHS interpretive theme for 2014. To update the Brown House interpretation that year, we retained material from 2013, but added components. These elements presented the Browns as consumers and illustrated their place in Providence through their relationships with tradesmen and women.

Preparation

Primary and secondary sources inspire WCD characters and activities. Brown family manuscripts, contemporary diaries and newspapers were shared in advance of the event. Scholarly articles, early maps and images of Providence and Brown family members were also made available.

A training session was offered a few weeks before WCD to help interpreters develop characters and become familiar with the John Brown House Museum. In 2014, a walking tour grounded our interpreters in the Providence landscape, important for those who don’t live locally, and helped interpreters learn to accommodate different learning styles.

The presentation of WCD was more stage direction than script. It included a table shared with interpreters and staff and simultaneous activities in multiple spaces. Visitor and interpreter logistics were managed by education department staff. Research and training materials for the event and the WCD schedule were developed by collections staff.

Successes

Simultaneity works. In 2013, we saw increased “dwell time” in the house as people came in the morning, went on a walking tour, and returned in the afternoon to find out what they’d missed. We created engaging characters that visitors cared about. In fact, the narrative was intriguing enough that in 2014, two women who had read about WCD on an interpreter’s blog traveled from New York to Providence for a weekend trip centered on the event. The event fostered popular interest that our regular house tour lacked.

The interior physical presentation of the house was altered in significant ways for the WCD program. We began by “messing up” the rooms at the onset of the program. This evolved into sedate disturbance Friday night and finally blossomed in a fully occupied mess by Saturday morning. The visual changes were documented and attracted positive chatter and attention on Twitter.

Unscripted interactions provided visitors with individualized experiences and appealed to younger visitors. During the afternoon, the action moved outside as interpreters played lawn games. Drivers in Providence stopped by the road to take photos. Visitors responded positively, too. A Brown University student visitor wrote, “My friends and I really loved the whole experience of ‘What Cheer Day.’ The house really came alive, with all the…conversations (and food & games at the end!).”
Challenges

Living history representations of African American stories present particular challenges. The reenactor pool is small, and Historical Society policy prohibits the portrayal of enslaved people. In 2014, an African American fortuneteller joined the cast and offered more diversity to the stories. As our research reveals more African American individuals from Providence history, we strive to create and fill those roles.4 We are working toward expanding the diversity of our cast to better reflect Providence’s historical demographics.

Using the JBHM as a house presented another risk. In 2013, the concern was how administration, board members and docents would react to the period-room installations being disrupted by live human habitation.5 We discovered that while visitors, board members, administration and staff loved the event, our docents were bored. In this new model of interpretation, costumed interpreters had usurped the docents’ interpretive role. To relieve this stress, we scheduled fewer docents in 2014.

Most interpretation at JBHM is really instruction. Docent-guided tours provide an unscripted but controlled narrative. Scripted audio tours are used in order of the tracks and locations. To make an immersive, unscripted day of interpretation work well, interpretive points must be clearly assigned and understood. Staff and interpreters must be well prepared and self-motivated.

The most controversial risk we took with WCD was allowing interpreters to inhabit the period exhibit rooms. We employed a combination of permanent collections, reproductions and personal items. Interpreters eat and drink and carry out such daily routines as face washing with “vegetable milk” to remove freckles.6 Our collections policies prohibit such activities, but we make exceptions for verisimilitude. We manage some risks by engaging costumed collections staff as servants for the program. For the 2015 season of WCD, staff worked together to create a new written policy regarding collections, reproductions and the use of the spaces in a controlled manner.

Using the Past to Inform the Future

As we planned WCD 2015, we mused over questions regarding authenticity and interpretation. How authentic is the day? What do we do when we can’t use the fireplaces or most of the furniture? With little research available about the Browns’ servants, should we script those roles with educated conjecture? What new characters can illustrate historical topics? Can we balance big themes with small dramas? In WCD 2015, we strove to address larger themes and reflect current issues even as we remained in 1800. Adding incremental risks kept staff and interpreters engaged. This further engaged our visitors.

Conclusion

On the surface, “What Cheer Day” and the “Newport Stamp Act Protest” represent different kinds of civilian-based living history events grounded in different eras of Rhode Island history. But both illustrate America’s early stories. Presenting these stories to the public...
through researched-based living history sheds new light on history and helps everyone—museum staff, interpreters and the public—better relate to and understand the past.

One of the greatest event reviews we received came from a visitor who wrote, “I got a real sense of what [it] was about—and promptly went home and read a lot more.” As organizations whose core mission is education, it gives us great satisfaction to know that our risky ventures have inspired a greater understanding of the past which, in turn, can better shape the future. 

Endnotes

1. The name is derived from “What Cheer, netop?” as the Narragansets greeted Roger Williams in the winter of 1636.

2. One team member had experienced this 2011 immersive version of Macbeth set in a fictional hotel. Notions of simultaneity and occupation ultimately combine in WCD’s current form.


4. Bono Brown, a free African American soap maker, appears in the Enos Hitchcock papers, along with Hitchcock’s free servant Caesar (RIHS MSS 78). These are among the characters we hope to add to future events.

5. Docents had been resentful, and some even resigned when the house tour shifted away from decorative arts to social history in 2005.

6. This was based on an ad for Dr. Prentis’s Vegetable Milk in the Providence Gazette, October 25, 1800, promising to take off “Tan and Freckles.” We used almond milk.

About the Authors

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2017 Annual Meeting & Conference

The 2017 ALHFAM Annual Meeting will be hosted in Rochester, New York by Genesee Country Village & Museum on June 9-13, 2017. The theme of the meeting is "Breaking Through Barriers: Living History in Modern Times."

Visit alhfam.org for more information and the Call for Papers.
Harnessing Reenactors Talents to Achieve Your Mission

Mark Texel
Morris County Park Commission, Morristown, New Jersey

Overview to the Dilemma

From 1994 to 2006 a “Civil War Weekend” was held at Fosterfields Living Historical Farm. Located in Morristown, New Jersey and owned and managed by the Morris County Park Commission, this site’s living history programming focuses primarily on the time period 1880 to 1930. The purpose of Fosterfields’ Civil War weekend was two-fold:

1. Use the restored grounds of this 200-acre working farm site as a stage for interpreting the Civil War through a broad lens by depicting both Federal and Confederate encampments.


Fosterfields’ Civil War special event was much more successful in achieving the first goal and less so towards the second. Approximately 150 reenactors depicted both Confederate and Union army camps and camp followers. Each camp featured a full daily regimen of drilling, artillery firing and cavalry demonstrations, interpretation of camp life and an afternoon mock battle each day. Naturally the mock battle drew the largest crowds; ranging from 500 to 1,500 visitors each day depending on the weather (Fig. 1).

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Fig. 1: Members of the Second New Jersey Brigade charge the Confederate lines during a reenactment at Fosterfields Living Historical Farm in 2001. Photo credit: Morris County Park Commission, Fosterfields Living Historical Farm.
By the time the event was in its ninth year it had become somewhat stale, formulaic and predictable. Although the public enjoyed touring the camps and seeing and hearing the roar of the guns, Fosterfields’ staff and volunteers increasingly complained of a number of issues. First and foremost, the difficulties of molding a late-nineteenth to early-twentieth-century farm into an effective “stage” for interpreting the Civil War. It begged the question: What do you do during this weekend when the site’s regular and compelling interpretive storyline is put on hold? Serious authenticity problems also began to plague the event. Reenacting a “mock battle” where one never actually occurred raised questions about why Fosterfields was holding this event in the first place. Was it purely to pad its visitation and revenue statistics?

Solving the Dilemma
Several major steps were implemented by Fosterfields’ staff and its reenactor friends beginning in 2002 to breathe new life into the event, and provide more connective tissue to the site’s own history.

The first step was finding a viable interpretive connection to Revere’s tour of duty. Members of the reenacting community were instrumental in researching the general’s career and selecting an appropriate battle scenario from an actual engagement of the Second New Jersey Brigade to interpret. A portion of the 1862 Battle of Oak Grove was chosen. An interpretive “libretto” for the battle scene and schedule of events was given to visitors, and a narrator was hired to describe the battle action in greater detail.

The second step involved creating more stringent guidelines on authenticity for costuming and material culture, and safety guidelines for the reenactors, site staff, volunteers and visitors. Programming during the event was designed to integrate more the period setting and scenario. For example, the site’s restored gothic revival house The Willows became a forum for first-person portrayals of General Revere and his wife later in life recalling events before, during and after the war. Both camps offered more interactive programming for visitors such as recruiting and drilling them, period baseball and scripted vignettes within the camp that involved interaction with Fosterfields’ costumed interpreters. An evening candlelight tour of the camps, complete with period music, songs and storytelling was also initiated. Exhibits and artifact displays focusing on the site’s historic connections to the Civil War were featured inside the Visitors Center, along with lectures and related programs including outreach to local schools from the reenactors.

The results from these efforts were very positive. The event enjoyed a higher caliber of success in terms of quality and authenticity of the experience for visitors, reenactors and staff. Not coincidentally, the event also increased its attendance noticeably.

The Next Generation
The Morris County Park Commission made the decision in the fall of 2006 to move towards more mission-based special events at Fosterfields which better reflected its circa 1917 to 1927 period of significance and restoration. Several long-running special events (including the Civil War Weekend) were suspended. Yet, to maintain close ties with the reenacting community which had worked very hard for years to make Fosterfields’ event a success, a smaller Federal encampment using members of the same unit was created at another Morris County Park Commission historic site in Morristown, Historic Speedwell. This 8.5 acre site with nine preserved historic buildings was looking for more special events related to its circa 1830s to 1860s period of significance. Furthermore, the site’s superintendent had experience working successfully with reenactors at previous jobs.

Since 2007 this event has been a major success for Historic Speedwell, drawing the largest audience the site has ever seen. The scale of the event is more appropriate featuring 30 to 50 reenactors and their equipment, as are the event’s interpretive elements.

In addition to drilling, firing and camp life activities, Civil-War era telegraphy and other battlefield communications are explored. This connects directly to Speedwell’s mission because the first successful working electromagnetic telegraph in the United States was demonstrated at this site in 1838. There is an afternoon skirmish, but through the context of war games as part of Union Army combat preparations, rather than a battle reenactment (Fig. 2).

While the Park Commission’s other sites developed Civil War programming, Fosterfields continued to utilize the talents and expertise of
Fosterfields also provides acreage on its back pastures to the Second New Jersey Regiment, an active Civil War unit, for their springtime muster and drilling weekend, keeping the door open for a potential future Civil War event. Perhaps an encampment of GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) Union veterans and their families on the lawn of The Willows?

**Conclusion**

It is absolutely possible to create both small and large scale meaningful and interpretively sound reenactor driven events at living history museums and historic sites. The goals of both the site and the reenactor groups do not have to be mutually exclusive or competitive. It takes a willing commitment from both groups to work together to find common agendas for events to be successful and sustainable. Reenactors can absolutely be our historic site’s best friends - helping us achieve both visitation and financial success essential to keeping our doors open.

Fig. 2: Members of the Second New Jersey Brigade interpret signal corps equipment during the 2008 Civil War Weekend at Historic Speedwell. Photo credit: Morris County Park Commission, Historic Speedwell.

Fig. 3: Members of the Warren and Sussex Great War Association portray World War I Doughboys back from the Great War reminiscing inside the Fosterfields farmhouse. Photo credit: Ralph Iacobelli, Morris County Park Commission.
Reenactors in the House:
Planning the Big Event

Mark A. Turdo
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Reenactments, like other museum programs, are time, staff and resource intensive, but they are not always treated as such. Some reenactment planning models turn much of the responsibility over to reenactors, with varying results. While reenactors should be your partners, you, and not your reenactors, are ultimately responsible for the program’s outcome.

Rather than asking reenactors to create the show for you, partnering with them to create a coordinated approach will allow you to hold manageable and successful events. This is not as easy as it sounds. Your site needs to find what works best for your needs. What follows is based on my experience as a reenactor and when I served as reenactment coordinator and liason at Fort Ticonderoga.

Before You Begin

Why do you want to host a reenactment? Is it mission, revenue or visitation driven? Is a reenactment the best way to interpret your story? What kinds of reenactors are available? What do you want visitors to get out of it? What size event can your staff and site reasonably accommodate?

That last question is perhaps the most important. Bigger events draw visitors, but they can easily leave your visitors and staff feeling overwhelmed. Smaller events have the advantage of feeling more intimate for visitors and easier for you to plan. A useful question to ask is whether your show can be just as dramatic and successful with 500 reenactors versus 1,000.

Working With Reenactors

Not all reenactment units are created equal. There is a wide range of skills and abilities out there. Some know their history and portray themselves well. These units often work effectively with the public. Others focus on the socializing opportunities reenacting provides, and are less interested in public interpretation. Most units have a mix of these personalities.

Like other volunteers, reenactors require communicated expectations and boundaries. As the host site, you are responsible for making sure everyone understands what is expected during the event.

An effective means to share your expectations is to establish reenactment guidelines. These guidelines should lay out everyone’s (staff and reenactor) expectations and responsibilities. Your guidelines are really an event philosophy wrapped in practical applications and need to be more than a list of “dos and don’ts.” Though it is a cliché, rules are made to be broken and they will be. You will need to write guidelines that you can readily and fairly enforce, otherwise you will drive your staff crazy trying to police participants, and the reenactors will start to feel unwelcome.

Successful guidelines are not written by the staff alone. You should work with your reenactors to develop them. Reenactors have valuable experience and can make positive contributions to the process. Besides, if your reenactors have a hand in writing the guidelines they will also help enforce them.

Fort Ticonderoga has had working guidelines since 1996 (see Organizing Event on the Reenacting Resources page). They touch on almost every aspect of reenactment events from planning to execution, including guidelines for:
- Participation
- Health & safety
- Security
- Authenticity (these are very broad)
- General conduct (particularly around visitors)
- Arrival & registration
- Parking and traffic control
- Supplies and facilities
- Command and control
- The camp
- Fire prevention
• Protecting collections and archeological resources
• Tactical demonstrations
• Safety inspectors & inspections
• Weapons (further divided into small arms and artillery sections)
• Edged weapons
• Photographic rights and services
• Sutlers

While your guidelines should be fair (and strictly enforced) they should not be set in stone. They should be a “living document” that changes to meet new needs as they arise.

Event Staffing
While the event will require most if not all of your staff, it helps to identify one staff member as a reenactment liaison, a single point of contact who will work with the reenacting community. This person is the “face” of the event. He or she will take the lead on setting the event date, creating invitation materials, registering units, organizing all necessities and answering LOTS of questions. As the event gets closer this will be all your liaison does.

This person does not necessarily need to have reenacting experience, but they should be willing to work with and learn from reenactors who are experienced event organizers and can contribute expertise and resources beyond what you might have on staff.

Perhaps the most beneficial (and overlooked) aspect of the reenacting community is their experience in period military administration and command structures. Over the last few years there have been a growing number of reenactors specializing in the administrative side of military life. Historically this is how an army’s leadership communicated with its soldiers. You can use these recreated systems to communicate with participants before and during the event.

It helps to know each of these positions and their responsibilities. One American Revolutionary War unit, Colonel Bailey’s Company, Second Massachusetts’s Regiment, has put together a website devoted to organizing eighteenth-century events. This site includes job descriptions for each of the administrative officers and other necessary event details (see Organizing Event on the Reenacting Resources page).

Fort Ticonderoga takes a more active approach than some sites in coordinating events. While the Fort works with reenactor staff officers, it also identifies and confirms event command staffs. These commands staffs consist of reenactor officers who serve for three-year terms, and include field commanders, quartermasters, master gunners and safety inspectors. These positions work closely with the reenactment liaison to plan and organize the event.

Under this system the Fort knows there is a clear chain of command with reliable reenactors in positions of responsibility. The site benefits from the expertise of the command staff, which helps coordinate the event’s administration. Finally, it gives everyone a greater stake in the event’s success.

Another way to do this is to identify a host unit or units who are responsible for helping your site plan and coordinate the event. A host unit functions much the same way as a command staff, but your site often relies on the host unit to coordinate much of the administration. In some places the site-host unit relationship is often quite informal. Naturally you can tailor an administrative system to fit your site or event needs.

Whether you choose to work with an identified command staff or a host unit, find those units you are most comfortable working with. Just because a unit is local to your area does not mean they are the right ones to help coordinate your event.

Participant Invitation & Registration
Managing the event’s invitation and registration process helps you meet your stated goals, prepare for the event’s logistics, screen unwanted participants, respond to emergencies and ensure a quality visitor experience.

Depending on the goal of your program, you can invite reenactors as:
• Individuals - which makes for a small show, but you have the greatest interpretive oversight
• Groups – allows you to create a larger show, and retain a good deal of interpretive oversight
• Umbrella organizations – an easy means to create a large show, but much more difficult for your site to oversee (for more
Most reenactment units hold their annual meetings between late January and March, and they set their annual schedule at this time. You will need to have your invitation out before then. Invitations should request basic information from reenactors about what they can provide and what they require. Information the site can request includes the number of participants, number and types of tents or other shelters (we are starting to see more RVs at events) and number and size of artillery pieces. If required, request proof of unit insurance. Remember to include a registration deadline, and stick to it. Units that are interested will respond with their estimates for each and the necessary insurance information.

Fort Ticonderoga chooses to invite units rather than invite individuals or umbrella organizations. Any unit may request an invitation to the Fort’s event, provided they submit references and a brief unit history (only units that existed historically are permitted). Generally the Fort will invite these units (although units have been turned down) for that year’s event. The unit will continue to be invited back as long as unit members work well with others and adhere to the guidelines. Any unit that disregards the guidelines is placed on probation, uninvited for a year or removed from the invitation list all together, depending on the situation.

Invitations should be sent out based on more than the available space or how many reenactors are in the area. Only invite participants or units who are willing to support your stated event goals, especially in regards to working with the public. Inviting reenactors who are not visitor-friendly may turn off visitors who encounter them. Remember in this situation the only one with anonymity is the reenactor. Visitors will remember the site.

While you plan an event with the estimates each unit sent back before the event, you may want to know the actual numbers, including:

- Number registered (this can be compared with the number who pre-registered and those counted in camp during roll call)
- Army & unit affiliation
- Individual emergency contact information
- Vehicle information

Having a central registration tent and a printed registration form will speed this process up. The registration tent can also serve as the distribution center for event paperwork and information. This is also your first line of security, preventing uninvited or prohibited people (walk-ons) from attending.

Communication

Reenactors are incredibly plugged in to the internet. Units and individuals have their own websites, list-servs, blogs and social networking pages. E-mail has been the primary event-planning tool among reenactors for years, so it would not be difficult to use it for your own event needs. E-mail makes it easy to disseminate information to all participants quickly (it also eases postal and telephone communications & expenses) and works very well for smaller events.

For larger events you can also use a dedicated event website to post updates and information, which is what Fort Ticonderoga uses (see Organizing Event on the Reenacting Resources page). The Fort’s website includes upcoming event information, registration materials, staff contacts and a copy of the reenactment guidelines. As updates are posted an e-mail alert goes out to participating units. Older posts are archived on the website. Since the Fort hosts both French & Indian War and Revolutionary War events the website includes both general reenacting information and specific pages devoted to each event.

The Fort’s website requires the assistance of a webmaster, adding another layer of administration and a (short) lag time between creating and posting updates. Another way to do this is to create an event-related blog. Blogs are free, interactive, self-archiving, can file share and can be faster to update.

Despite your well-worded updates, not everyone reads everything. Be prepared to repeat yourself. Very often the only people who read your posts are the unit commanders and contacts.

Battles and Beyond

Event planning often focuses on logistics and battles, but other interpretive events are necessary. It does not make sense to spend so much time organizing a weekend encampment and focus only on the battles. It is true that the battles are popular and often what gets people to
our sites, but that’s a lot of work for what amounts to three hours of public interpretation. Weekend-long events can show visitors that military life was (and still is) more than just battles. Fortunately there are growing numbers of reenactors who are moving beyond the battle. They are interested in other aspects of period military life and can effectively interpret these for visitors. One way to start developing non-battle interpretations is to ask the registered units if they are willing to present special programs. Possibilities include:

- Medical demos
- Refugee camps (showing how families were effected)
- Digging entrenchments or kitchens (if site allows)
- Courts martial
- Period fashion shows
- Drilling and firing demos (really discussions of technology and its use)
- Craft demos

You can also ask for a site-specific program. If you do, consider offering units or individuals access to your collections, archives and staff. Interpretively minded reenactors are always looking to expand their knowledge. Working with them to develop programs for your site means everyone, you, the reenactor and your visitors, will benefit.

Visitor Guides
I would say most visitors are disoriented during events. They do not understand what they are seeing or why it is happening, leaving them overwhelmed by it all. Fort Ticonderoga found that events had grown so large that people did not know where to go or what to do next.

It may be helpful to create a guide to help orient visitors to what is happening and where. These can be very basic, just a single page of general information. They can also be more detailed and include:

- Schedule of events
- Historical introduction
- Background information
- Icebreaker questions (gives visitors something better to ask than “is that real food?”)
- Book list (helps boost sales in the gift shop)

However detailed you choose to make it, your event guide should provide basic tools to allow visitors to explore the camp and understand the battles.

Conclusion
Remember, not all reenactors will come to your site with an interpretive plan in hand. Instead you need to be organized. The more organized you are in your approach to events, the more organized the reenactors will be and ultimately the more enjoyable the event will be for everyone.

Good luck and have fun.

Reenacting Resources:

Organizing Events:
Reenacting at Fort Ticonderoga: http://fort-ticonderoga250th.org/index.htm


2nd Massachusetts Regiment: http://www.2ndmass.org/public/rsOrgEvents.aspx

Reenactor Contacts:
Brigade of the American Revolution: http://www.brigade.org/

British Brigade: http://www.britishbrigade.org/

Civil War Reenactment Headquarters: http://www.reenactmenthq.com/

"Do You Guys Own Slaves?"
A Case Study of a High-Minded Living History Event

by Matthew C. White

In academia, living history and public history are often looked down upon. Ask a traditional history professor, “What comes to mind when I say reenactor?” and respondents typically answer with a variation of “an overweight, drunken Confederate reenactor who adores the Lost Cause, has a pick-up truck and could care less about looking at history when it does not reinforce their preconceived ideas.”

Such a description can often be accurate. And such reenactors have a different idea about the purposes and meaning of reenacting than do more conscientious, well-studied individuals. These different groups have different goals, different levels of engagement with period material culture, and different levels of historical background knowledge.

Many historic sites collaborate with reenactors because volunteer reenactors can be a valuable, and often free, resource whose presence can draw in and captivate visitors. It is important, however, for sites to develop programming that can best appeal to reenactors who responsibly tell a site’s stories and perpetuate a site’s mission. It is also helpful to provide such reenactors with opportunities to cultivate their skills, knowledge and enjoyment of their history-based hobby. If sites can cultivate good relationships with desirable reenactors and occasionally delegate some authority to them, sites and reenactors can jointly perform sophisticated historical work while raising a site’s profile.

As public historians know, delivering entertaining yet informative programming for diverse audiences is hard work. Those in academia on the “pure” history side might scoff at public history. But convincingly imparting academic ideas with the tools that living historians have at their disposal is a complex undertaking. It’s akin to reverse engineering the writing of a scholarly article. Instead of building an argument with evidence, the reenactors become the evidence. Visitors and spectators can put this evidence together to form their own understanding. One recent event experimented with ideas like this to varying degrees of success.

The event, To Princeton With Peale, took place on January 2 and 3, 2015. Some of the design for the event evolved from other military history-oriented events that had depicted the Revolutionary War and the U.S. Civil War. With those events in mind, friend and fellow ALHFAM member David Niescior and I decided that a similar event might shine light on the Trenton-Princeton campaign of 1776-77 that happened near where we live.

After some brainstorming, we concluded that we could combine the real-time tour of the Battle of Princeton, which takes place in early January each year, with other local events to make one big event. We could connect the Old Barracks in Trenton, New Jersey, and Princeton Battlefield by re-creating the
overnight march of the Continental Army from Trenton to Princeton that had culminated in the battle. Theoretically, such an event could re-contextualize and reconnect not only those historic sites, but the whole corridor between those sites. It could encourage people to think about the importance of places they usually take for granted.

While we wanted people to think about their neighborhood and its importance during the Revolution, we also hoped spectators would think more about what the Revolution was and about what it meant to the people who fought at or lived at these places. We hoped to impart the importance of this campaign, and impart what was driving and sustaining the campaign.

I have a particular interest in the Philadelphia militia during the Revolution. I believe that the Philadelphia militia is important to understanding the Trenton-Princeton Campaign. One of my goals for the event was to explain why the Philadelphia militia was important during the campaign and particularly why the Philadelphia militia turned out even when many people in the Mid-Atlantic region thought Revolution was a lost cause.

The desperation of Pennsylvania’s Council of Safety and Philadelphia’s other Whig leadership, like John Cadwalader, led them to allow Philadelphia’s “lower sort” to trade militia service for entry into Philadelphia’s political life. Included were a small number of African-Americans who were already enrolled in the militia as drummers and fifers. This action ushered in Philadelphia’s period of radical republicanism and egalitarianism that did not end until 1779. The ideology and culture of republicanism and levelling that was given a boost during this period is not typically a topic described in popular histories of the American Revolution. This might be new information for some spectators and participants.

To portray that revolutionary moment in Philadelphia, I believed participants should reflect what research had shown about the Philadelphia militia, especially about the company of Charles Willson Peale.\(^3\) We picked this company for a number of reasons. Peale kept an extensive diary, parts of which we could use as a source for vignettes to highlight some of our program messages. In addition, Peale might have some name recognition among participants and spectators. There are more records available about this company than for other Philadelphia militia companies. Finally, the make-up of Peale’s company was representative of Philadelphia’s revolution.

Initially, in Peale’s company, like the rest of the Philadelphia militia, membership was limited to men who had the means to pay to “kit themselves out” (gentlemen). They also had the means to train daily with the militia and not find their livelihood ruined. Eventually, citizenship became tied to militia service, in part due to the gentlemanly and independent connotations.

Prior to December 1776, fewer than half of Peale's company would have been considered "gentlemen" and therefore eligible for the franchise, even with a less rigid definition of "gentlemen." The crisis of late 1776, however, led the leadership in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania to trade citizenship for service. The ranks of Peale’s company and the rest of the Philadelphia militia were bolstered with fresh volunteers from the “lower sort” of the population.

While I am simplifying this trade-off, it appears to have rejuvenated Philadelphia's revolution and provided Washington with fresh, motivated, and relatively well-equipped soldiers at one of the low points of the Revolution. These militiamen supported the campaign that culminated in the Battle of Princeton. The Philadelphia militia played an important part in holding the army together, effecting its success and transforming a low point to a triumph. David and I felt that we could best educate the public by focusing on Peale’s company.

Like a micro-history, part of my research included reconstructing a muster roll and then researching the lives of individual company members to include their tax rate, their trade or profession, their ethnic background and their social connections. Because we actually had mini-biographies of each of the original militiamen, the military participants would be asked...
to interpret individual militiamen. We would have to trust the living historians invited to participate to portray these roles.

To support this research, about half the participants would dress the part of a uniformed Philadelphia militiaman. The other half would be asked to dress in various civilian lower-class garb and to take on a lower-class persona. We also asked a number of period tradespeople to come to the event to depict the trades of the people they were representing.

During the first day of the event, we hoped spectators would learn what service in the militia meant: a day full of work to maintain their livelihood, interspersed with drill. To a large degree, we could show the change in Philadelphia’s revolution through the material culture displayed by the individual reenactors. Clothing and item choices could suggest class differences between militiamen and tradesmen. Interpretation and programing would show what was at stake for the militiamen and others.

For the interpretation and event to be successful, expert reenactors were required. These living historians needed to have a solid understanding of eighteenth-century material culture. Some might need to read reliable historical information about the people they were representing.

Since the participants were volunteers with home and work lives, we supplemented the work of the living historians with programming, such as short vignettes, talks, and walking tours to expand the visitor experience. Other participants interpreted the lives of local civilians. We hoped these presentations would illustrate the collision and contrasts between Philadelphia’s revolution and the revolution people were experiencing in that part of New Jersey. That region was largely peopled with groups of Quakers who understood the Revolution differently from the Philadelphians portrayed by most of the reenactors.

The event was a success. There was a lot of interest from living historians with the skills and experience to make it successful. It was advantageous that we limited the number of participants to around 50 people. More would have made the event exponentially more difficult to manage. Like any event, however, there were a few problems.

A number of participants backed out at the last minute, and unfortunately many of them were trades interpreters. Most of our plans to have trades did
not materialize, with the exception of some bakers, tailors, and brewers. Fortunately, those trades were active throughout the day and received a lot of visitor attention. Also, the schedule of activities was not followed closely. This resulted in modifications or cancellations of some programming.

We discovered that some of the programming was probably too difficult for participants to successfully present, so several vignettes were cancelled. Programming planned for the afternoon after the march was also cancelled due to bad weather. This was actually a fortunate outcome, since some the participants were very tired after marching all night in freezing weather.

Still, the majority of supplementary talks and tours went on as planned and helped impart some of the “big” ideas to the public about the Philadelphia militia, the Revolution in the Delaware Valley and the campaign. We were successful enough that, throughout the first day at the Old Barracks, spectators asked about the differences in clothing, the life of the militia, republicanism, and other questions that suggested the programming was having a desired outcome.

The event brought success to the sponsoring sites. It garnered significant media coverage for both the Old Barracks and Princeton Battlefield. It brought the second highest number of visitors to the Old Barracks, just shy of the number of visitors who come out for the Battle of Trenton reenactment. The number of spectators at the real-time tour at Princeton Battlefield was said to have doubled from the usual number, in part because of the event.

I believe that “living historians” can do sophisticated work, but to do that kind of work, sites have to have dedicated and knowledgeable reenactors with whom they would be willing to occasionally share authority. In addition, very specific and manageable goals should be clearly stated for all participants. Sites benefit by building meaningful and constructive relationships with reenactors. Both sites and reenactors can urge each other to new levels of quality while remembering that reenactors are part-time volunteers. In catering to reenactors, sites should occasionally take into consideration the experiences that reenactors want to have. This will draw in other curious, like-minded reenactors.

Moments during this event showed not only that the participants were worthy of the sites’ trust, but also that reenactors can help high-minded living history events create sophisticated and fresh historical work in places usually not thought of as historical. Like the event organizers, the participants came to the event with varying degrees of pre-learning; by the end of the first day, many participants understood and could impart the “big ideas” of the event.

During the overnight march, while we were walking through Trenton, pedestrians, people in bars, and people in vehicles started asking us what we were doing. In some cases, people were so shocked by our presence that they paralleled us for miles in their vehicles with their cell phone cameras out. Obviously we were a novelty worth remarking about and telling friends. Notably, one of the vehicles stopped and someone inside jokingly asked, “Do you guys own
Many participants responded, “There are no slaves here, only freemen.” This response was a paraphrased quote from a Philadelphia broadside. Then the drummer, an African-American, began describing African-Americans in the Philadelphia militia and the Revolutionary-era armies.

This sort of interaction, while not unexpected, became some of the most meaningful moments of the event for me and other participants. Our very presence in those streets at that time welcomed interaction with curious bystanders who had no idea that such an event was taking place or what the event even represented. This was just the sort of experience that keeps me interested in doing living history; it is an attitude shared by other participants.

Endnotes

1. The author would like to thank David Niescior, John U. Rees, Carrie Fellows, Asher Lurie, Andrew Watson Kirk, Richard Patterson, John Mills, Will Tatum, R. Scott Stephenson, and many others for helping to create and manage this event and for expanding my thinking on this topic. This not-so-scientific study took place with the help of several Rutgers-Camden and Rowan University professors.

2. An event that took place in 2009 in Chickamauga National Battlefield Park that presented a re-created “Company Aytch” was a particularly notable use of living history as historiographical intervention. For a description of the event see http://bullyforbragg.blogspot.com/2008/09/co-aytch-recap.html. Also, Revolutionary War-era events centered on the Boston Massacre or “Model Companies” are particularly notable attempts to push the limits of the hobby. The staff of Fort Ticonderoga in particular come to mind as skilled practitioners of this style of living history.


4. January is the slow season at Fort Ticonderoga, so we were happy to have an influx of professional living historians from that site to give a much-needed boost to the event.


6. Anywhere between 150 and 300 spectators came out for the real-time tour, either doubling the normal number or quadrupling it, depending on the source.

About the Author

Matthew C. White is a recovering graduate student of history who studied at Rutgers University-Camden. As a reenactor, he is the cousin of John U. Rees. White has several articles to his credit that were included in Blackwell's International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest and the Encyclopedia of Philadelphia.