



Re-enactors promote interest in life during Revolutionary War

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It's been said that if you don't know your past, you can't know your future.

Ozaukee County Pioneer Village

Photo/Vernessa Richardson

Diana Ruzicki-Sauter of Kenosha makes bobbin lace during the re-enactment. Lace-making was a valued handicraft.

Photo/Vernessa Richardson

Revolutionary War re-enactors from the North West Territory Alliance give a flint and steel demonstration at Ozaukee County Pioneer Village in the Town of Saukville on

You may have an idea as to how some critical events in the history of the United States unfolded, but sometimes it takes a vivid and technically accurate portrayal to really bring those events home, something that goes beyond the textbook.

The North West Territory Alliance is a living history organization formed to promote interest in America's Revolutionary War of 1775-1783. The group is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to the study of the culture and arts during the American Revolution.

Last weekend, group members re-created a bit of history at the Ozaukee County Pioneer Village in the Town of Saukville.

Pioneer Village is a collection of historic buildings on Highway I and provided a realistic backdrop for staged battles of the Revolutionary War last Saturday and Sunday.

Almost all of the participants camped out in rudimentary tents at Pioneer Village on the Friday night preceding the battle re-enactments.

"There is a lot of research on behalf of those that participate," said Mike John, spokesman for the alliance.

"People from real units in the Revolutionary War are researched extensively. These days, there are chat rooms on the Internet for members to exchange information and discoveries."

During the rest of the year, when soldiers aren't shooting at each other, members repair and add to their uniforms and weaponry.

"This is a very family-oriented event, as the soldiers often had family nearby," John said. "Some of the soldiers' wives would accompany them on the battlefield and act as nurses, or they scavenged some of the equipment like ammunition and shoes, which were at a premium."

More than 200 re-enactors, representing 20 separate groups, depicted the struggle between colonial American forces and the red-coated British. The groups were a mix of colonists, professional British soldiers, French troops and German mercenaries.

Spectators numbering in the hundreds watched from atop a large hill as the soldiers maneuvered for position and began to scout out their enemy's position. Some of them were in the brush, others in the open. The weapons were loud, and at times the cannons could be deafening.

Other historic re-creations included the soldiers' camp life, 18th-century music and dance instruction, and a period fashion show for ladies and gentlemen.

Those who participate in this living history often catch the bug early. Scott Abig lives in Port Washington and first came to an NWTA event when he was 11.

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Photo/Vernessa Richardson

Elizabeth Simpson of Burlington fries apples during the Revolutionary War re-enactment. During the war, soldiers' wives would often accompany them to the battlefield.

"I'm 21 years old now and I belong to the Brigade of Guards," said Abig. "This is my 10th year participating in these events. When I first moved to Wisconsin, I came as a spectator to the re-enactment. They said I could come out, and I took them up on their offer."

Abig has done some research on the Revolutionary War.

"I read what I can," he said. "I portray an actual soldier by the name of Robert Bond who was a real soldier in the First Guard."

Abig said a soldier's rank was identified by the coats they wore, how many buttons they had on their coats and how they were sewn.

"You have to keep in mind that there wasn't a standard uniform," Abig said. "We have a tailor that can make our uniforms out of authentic patterns."

Break from Harleys

For Tammy Leonard of Grafton, the re-enactment provided a welcome respite from the Milwaukee area's Harley-Davidson mania. "It's peaceful out here at the Pioneer Village, and we heard buildings were brought in here from all over."

Leonard said she could smell the fires from the soldiers' camps when she arrived.

"It causes you to think of the energy, the basic sacrifice they made to go into battle," she said. "This is important for me and my family to see, it kind of puts things into perspective."

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