

**Revive, Relive, Remember:  
Re-enactors and the Memory of the American Revolution**

In December 2009, the American Revolution Center (ARC) released a report entitled “The American Revolution. Who Cares?” The report’s tagline boldly declared, “Americans are yearning to learn, failing to know.” This grim assessment was founded upon the results of a national survey commissioned by ARC to measure adults’ knowledge of the history and legacy of the American Revolution.<sup>1</sup> The survey included 27 multiple-choice questions of varying difficulty, some of which were previously administered to fourth, eighth and twelfth-graders as standardized test questions. Some questions tested adults’ knowledge of one or more of the “issues related to the Revolutionary documents, people, and events,” while other questions “asked attitudinal questions about the respondents’ perception of the importance of understanding the Revolutionary history and the institutions that were established to preserve [American] freedoms and liberties.”<sup>2</sup> According to the report, 83 percent of Americans failed the basic knowledge test. Yet while the scholarly knee-jerk reaction to the widespread failure might be to think, “the average American clearly doesn’t care about history,” the study also reported nearly nine out of ten Americans initially believed they would pass. Furthermore, they thought that having “knowledge of the American Revolution and its principles is very important.”<sup>3</sup>

But if Americans are so interested in Revolutionary history, and moreover, believe it is important, why would they score so poorly on the test? Are we failing to impart the information

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Cole, “The American Revolution. Who Cares?” (Washington, DC: The American Revolution Center, 2009). The American Revolution Center, “A Living Memorial to the American Revolution and Its Enduring Legacy; The American Revolution Center,” <http://americanrevolutioncenter.org>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

in the first place by glossing over the finer points? Or, do Americans have collective amnesia when it comes to the start of our shared past?

This paper maintains that the traditional methods of imparting historical information are failing to adequately inspire a self-perpetuating interest in the American Revolution and its implications. This lack of historical awareness fundamentally permits Americans to forget the chronology of events in addition to the larger contextual meaning. Rather than continuously reinforcing a failing system, perhaps alternative methods – methods that make use of experiential learning and public history - should be given the chance to influence public memory.

This project focuses on American Revolutionary War re-enactors as a case study. Participants in American Revolutionary War re-enactments are not often considered professional historical specialists, but rather, members of the public who have embraced a form of experiential learning through a very specific hobby. As a style of public historical interpretation, re-enactment offers effective and comprehensive methods of preserving and imparting the public historical memory of the American Revolution and late eighteenth century life to a broad audience that includes not only the general visiting public, but also the re-enactors themselves. Because re-enactment approaches history as an assortment of sources and interpretations, its participants are encouraged to generate a feeling of personal connection to and individualized interpretations of the historical time period. For this reason, re-enactment serves as an excellent case study when discussing the connections between public history and memory.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Or, Out in the Woods with My Tri-Corn Hat and a Tape Recorder**

Because this project revolves around a specific group of people – the volunteer corps of amateur historians, or re-enactors, who portray soldiers and civilians living and fighting during

the American Revolution – it became apparent that interviews and attendance at a variety of re-enactment events would be the most useful sources. Over a period of several months, I attended as many different American Revolutionary re-enactments as possible. Over one hundred re-enactors were surveyed, interviewed and observed during this time.

In order to obtain demographic information about the men and women who participate in Revolutionary War re-enactments, I created an online survey and posted it to “RevList,” an online group and listserv hosted by Yahoo.com. “RevList” functions as a message board and discussion forum for re-enactors interested in the eighteenth century, and boasts a membership of over 2,000 individuals. The survey remained open to re-enactors for a period of four months, and during the response period I did not discriminate by gender, regiment location, or character portrayal. I wanted to obtain the fullest picture possible of who re-enactors are in daily life.

I was a little more discriminatory when it came to whom I personally interviewed. Because of time and travel constraints I limited my interviews to re-enactors representing eighteenth century life in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. I chose to focus on New Jersey because it saw the most fighting during the Revolution, and on New York and Pennsylvania because they are the home states of New York and Philadelphia, the British and Continental headquarters, respectively. The focus on Maryland and Virginia stemmed from the states’ close proximity to American University. By focusing on these states, I was able to continuously conduct primary source research in between research trips to the Mid-Atlantic.

Because American University has a policy regarding the use of human subjects, all re-enactors who were interviewed were asked to sign a written agreement, which stated that they

understood and accepted the terms of this policy.<sup>4</sup> Most interviews were conducted in person, and tape-recorded for later use. The statements included in this project are the ideas and opinions of the re-enactors, and do not necessarily reflect my own opinions or the opinions of other re-enactment groups.

### **Private History With A Public Option: Bringing History, Memory and Interpretation to the People**

In his work *Historics: Why History Dominates Contemporary Society*, author Martin L. Davies uses the British Marxist historian Raphael Samuel's definition of history to explain why history is so prevalent in modern society. "History," he writes, "is a 'mass activity' that has 'possibly never had more followers than it does today...Virtually anyone can contribute to the historical consciousness, so history...is rather, a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instances of a thousand hands.'" <sup>5</sup> Davies' and Samuel's characterization of history suggests that every group or individual has some connection to history and, via that connection, has the power to create, adjust, or interpret history. One can theoretically delve into any kind of history she pleases at a moment's notice, and regardless of qualifications, can create her own understanding and interpretation of a given epoch. Davies points out that the public has increasing access to history in a variety of forms and functions. He writes:

"History comes at [the public] 24/7 in news bulletins, in the press, in fashion, on TV in films, docu-dramas, and documentaries, let alone in novels, biographies and erudite monographs. [History] fosters sociability through...family outings to living museums. It crops up in a host of local and national 'sites of memory.' It imposes rituals of commemoration."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The policy states that the interviewee gives permission for full use of interview materials for academic study and acknowledges that he or she has no literary property rights or copyright claim to the interview.

<sup>5</sup> Martin L. Davies, *Historics: Why History Dominates Contemporary Society* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 3-4.



But if history is necessarily becoming a more public field, meaning the public can easily access scholarship-based history at any time, why has Public History, the parent discipline of re-enactment, arisen as an academic field of study? Hasn't the traditional, academic field of history already addressed the public's desire not only to consume, but to actively participate in this scholarship?

According to several scholars, the answer is no. Patricia Mooney-Melvin, the director of Loyola University – Chicago's Public History Program maintains that the professionalization of history in the nineteenth century had a privatizing effect on the field. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, organizations like the American Historical Association (AHA) increasingly chose professional (academically trained) historians for leadership positions. These choices were carefully calculated maneuvers, intended to give historical organizations an increased sense of legitimacy. Mooney-Melvin asserts that, "after 1907 academic historians became more likely to hold the presidency of the AHA, and after 1928 virtually all presidents were academically trained and employed historians."<sup>7</sup> However, the movement to legitimize the field through professionalization had an inversely proportional effect on public access. The more professional the field of history became, the more insular its audience grew, and the less accessible it was to the public. According to Mooney-Melvin it is this insularity that "gave historians the false luxury to ignore the historical interest and [the] 'history-making' that took place outside of [academia]. The public's need for 'history-making' or the 'process by which people preserve and interpret the past and then reinterpret it in the light of new questions' ensured that [public] engagement with the past...continued regardless of the disinterest

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Mooney-Melvin, "Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition" in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, ed. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1999), 8.

expressed by the professional historical community.”<sup>8</sup> In essence, professional historians began to marginalize the public, or layperson’s desire to interpret the past.

Other scholars, like Martin Davies and Geoffrey Cubitt, suggest that professional historians have recognized the insularity and work to appear as though they are extending themselves to the masses, when they actually have done very little to remedy the situation. For example, memory plays a large role in one’s personal understanding of history. One can have the memory of his personal history and recall a momentous life occasion like a wedding, birth, or death. One can also take part in an event designed to initiate a public memory, such as attending Fourth of July festivities. Using such public and private events as his groundwork, Edward S. Casey identified four tiers of memory in his essay *Public Memory in Place and Time*.<sup>9</sup> Each type of memory has a connection to history, but the kind of memory one experiences depends upon the individual’s level of engagement with the event.

*Individual memory* “refers to the person who is engaged...on any given occasion.”<sup>10</sup> Theoretically, any encounter one has with history, or past events, should prompt an individual memory. Even if the individual does not remember the details of this history, she should remember the process of reading the textbook, watching the documentary or attending the re-enactment event and be able to repeat the general ideas. It does not matter if multiple people attend the same event or read the same book; one’s individual memories are unique.

*Social memory* is “held in common by those who are affiliated either by kinship ties, by geographical proximity in neighborhoods, cities and other regions, or by engagement in a

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 2, Figure 2.2.

<sup>10</sup> Edward S. Casey “Public Memory in Place and Time,” in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 20.

common project.”<sup>11</sup> A Revolutionary War re-enactment group, therefore, would have social memory, as would a family attending a re-enactment event. Members of both parties have a degree of kinship with one another, and are involved in the activities in the same time and space. Casey also takes pains to point out that one can have “social memories of events that one did not experience oneself, but that were undergone by consociates whom one does in fact know.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, new regimental recruits or infants too young to remember their own attendance at an event could remember past events via their kin, and participate in and pass down the social memory later on.

*Collective memory* is similar to social memory, but participants do not need to be familiar with one another. Participants in collective memory recall the same event, or have what Casey calls “commonality of content” despite the fact that they may never become personally acquainted.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, everyone in attendance at a re-enactment should have a collective memory of the event, whether they participated as Continental soldiers, camp followers, British artillerymen, or as the audience watching the battle. The chronology and underlying awareness of the event’s historical basis should be the same, even if the details differ slightly from group to group and from person to person.

At the top of the chain of memory sits *public memory*, the culmination of all previously mentioned memories. In a discussion of identity in nineteenth century novels, Liliane Weissberg wrote, “Memory was needed not simply to understand the past; it had to relate to who one was in the present.”<sup>14</sup> While designed for literature, this interpretation is also extremely applicable to history, especially of the Revolutionary variety. According to Casey, “every revolution, no

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Liliane Weissberg, “Introduction,” in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 10.

matter how radically it questions the official public memory of the [ancient] regime, immediately establishes as if by mandated necessity a new version of such memory.”<sup>15</sup> In this case, the American Revolution established what it meant to be “American.” As Americans, we draw our modern understanding of our identity from the history associated with our fight for independence, and we commemorate it through large public events, such as Fourth of July parades. While one can express the meaning and history through outward displays, it is not always necessary; an implicit understanding can be sufficient.

While academic historians may not have recognized and typified memory in as detailed a manner as Casey, they have recognized that memories are of great sentimental value and intellectual importance to the public. Cubitt points out that social historians have especially made memory “one of the central preoccupations of historical scholarship.”<sup>16</sup> Because memory is both universal and applicable to historical interpretation, it theoretically allows for full participation of behalf of the public. Yet while Cubitt and Casey indicate that historical studies have been influenced by public interest and memory, this does not mean that academic historians have allowed the public *carte blanche* rights to participation.

Davies claims that professional historians doubt that the public is actually interested in scholarly history. “Certainly when humanities disciplines need to prove their social value, [professional historians] gladly affirm history’s popular resonance. They can talk of making history ‘relevant,’ of aligning academic and social interests.”<sup>17</sup> But this is where historical sleight of hand comes in to play. Davies maintains that those who study history are irreversibly associated with having a “research mentality,” and history itself relies upon the knowledge of other fields, like “genetics, archaeology, medicine, biology, zoology, climatology, astronomy,”

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<sup>15</sup> Casey, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Davies, 1.

among others. This heavy reliance on other scholarly research-based fields is a quality that makes history well suited for academia and simultaneously exclusionary to the public. So while “professional historians celebrate history’s manifold ‘varieties,’ [and] its comprehensive ‘pluralism,’” historians are really using these characteristics as a means of shielding the isolationism inherent academic history. The extension of this false olive branch appears to have created a “proletarian” history revolt. As Mooney-Melvin asserted, the public *does*, in fact, need to be a part of the history-making and interpretation process. Through the prohibition of public participation, history ignores the potential for “grassroots” historical interpretation; calls for the re-examination of historical truisms and discussions of historical subjects that truly interest the general population are condemned to fall on deaf ears. Thus the creation of Public History, a diverse scholarly field dedicated to addressing the public’s historical interests and bringing history and the “history-making process” to the people, acts as a welcome a remedy to this academic dilemma.

Public history emerged as its own academic field in the 1970s.<sup>18</sup> According to the National Council of Public History (NCPH), the it is “a movement, methodology, and approach that promotes the collaborative study and practice of history; its practitioners embrace a mission to make their special insights accessible and useful to the public.”<sup>19</sup> Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, the academic sponsor and home base for NCPH, states it another,

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<sup>18</sup> The first National Council of Public History meeting was held in 1979, in conjunction with Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis. The conference was held in Montecito, California. We will refer to this moment as the official start of public history, because of its status as a “rival organization” to other, traditional historical associations. National Council of Public History, “National Council of Public History” Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, <http://ncph.org/cms>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

perhaps more concise way: public history is a field designed to “meet the needs of historians practicing history outside the traditional realms of academia.”<sup>20</sup>

The NCPH website boldly proclaims that public history practitioners do not necessarily have to be academic historians. In fact, public historians “include museum professionals, government and business historians, historical consultants, archivists, teachers, cultural resource managers, curators, film and media producers, policy advisors, oral historians, professors and students with public history interests, and many others.”<sup>21</sup> As the list suggests, public history can be a more nuanced field than straight academic history, and while there are academic public historians – professional historians whose scholarship works to design amateur academic forums for and include the public in serious historical interpretation – the field is far more inclusive than exclusive.

One large component of this new understanding of *who* can interpret history is *how* that person or group expresses the interpretation. Including so many professions into one “catchall” field necessarily provides diversity, and the openness to include alternatives methods, like re-enactment, on the list of legitimate means of historical practice. According to Constance B. Schulz, director of the Applied History program at the University of South Carolina, a public historian’s interpretation will include different primary source bases, including but not limited to oral histories, buildings, landscapes, artifacts and material culture, and electronic records. Public historians also seek a different audience and their interpretations will have a different application than those of a traditional historian. Where the traditional historian aims to use documentary

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

evidence to write an article for an academic journal, the public historian aims to use as many sources as possible with the end goal of contributing her findings to the public domain.<sup>22</sup>

Generally, “public domain” refers to a museum, historic site or house, documentary film or mainstream written media; however, these are not the only means of interpreting in the public sphere. For example, public historical interpretation can take shape in the form of interpersonal contact. This could mean a seminar or lecture series, where the historian directly addresses the public, taking questions, giving answers, and helping to shape and refine the public’s interpretation of an historical epoch. Public historical interpretation could also mean the synthesis and recreation of history amongst members of the public themselves, without the assistance of a professional historian. This kind of interpretation often comes into being through dramatic re-creations of the past, otherwise known as historical pageantry. Re-enactment provides a varied combination of the aforementioned “traditional” public domain resources, as well as the interpersonal seminar and recreation interpretations.

It is important here to distinguish between public memory and historical interpretation. Public memory deals with a preserved moment, or series of moments that are passed down through generations. However, the memory itself cannot really be changed; only remembered or forgotten. Because the American Revolution is a past event, we cannot create new public memories of it; however, we can pass down the public memory created for us by those who were contemporary to the war. Interpretation, on the other hand, has to do with how we come to understand the meaning of those memories. Historical events take on different meanings for different generations. Whereas we may think of the Revolution as an act of the utmost patriotism, those contemporary to the event had doubts and reservations. This concept of

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<sup>22</sup> Constance Schulz, “Becoming a Public Historian” in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, ed. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1999), 32 – 38.

interpretive commemoration best exemplified in the history of Revolutionary New Jersey, a colony once ambivalent to warfare yet simultaneously the state we call “The Crossroads of the Revolution.”

According to historical record, many residents of eighteenth century New Jersey “sought reform and reconciliation with Britain, not independence” as late as 1776.<sup>23</sup> British and Loyalist forces encouraged loyalist sentiments in New Jersey, because of its strategic location between “the de facto rebel capital in Philadelphia and the chief British garrison in New York City.”<sup>24</sup> If New Jersey were to remain loyalist, “a surge of similar loyalist sentiment could swing Pennsylvania and New York and possibly Delaware in the same defeatist direction.”<sup>25</sup> For the same reasons the American Continental Army would have wanted to sway New Jersey toward independence. Throughout the affair, most New Jersey residents were, as David J. Fowler called them, “‘reluctant rebels’ [who] had ‘no substantive quarrel’ with Great Britain.”<sup>26</sup> Comparatively, the 238 documented battles and countless undocumented skirmishes fought within the state’s lines are a statistic of pride in modern New Jersey. In commemorating New Jersey’s role in the Revolution, many modern residents honor “the creation of a new people who combined freedom and courage, realism and idealism, in a way that has established a different kind of country” rather than publicly remembering the reluctance and inclination towards Loyalism exhibited by many eighteenth century New Jersey residents and even the state’s constitution, which “to the increasing embarrassment of its citizens” continued to refer to New

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<sup>23</sup> David J. Fowler, “These Were Troublesome Times Indeed: Social and Economic Conditions in Revolutionary New Jersey,” in *New Jersey in the American Revolution*, ed. Barbara J. Mitnick (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rivergate Books, 2005), 21.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Edward Lender, “The ‘Cockpit’ Reconsidered: Revolutionary New Jersey as a Military Theater,” in *New Jersey in the American Revolution*, ed. Barbara J. Mitnick (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rivergate Books, 2005), 45.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Fleming, “Crossroads of the American Revolution,” in *New Jersey in the American Revolution*, ed. Barbara J. Mitnick (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rivergate Books, 2005), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Fowler, 20.



Jersey as a colony until 1844.<sup>27</sup> Though the citizens contemporary to the Revolution might have painted New Jersey as a place that was hedging its bets throughout the war, modern citizens think of New Jersey as a state exemplifying the bravery and sacrifice needed to win the Revolution.

Historical interpretation, therefore, is ever changing. Just as we can participate in a social memory that predates us, we can similarly participate in the public memory of the Revolution by studying past interpretations, and by considering and creating our own interpretations and memories. In current generations, groups comprised of re-enactors and living historians choose to honor and interpret the past by creating simulation memories of the American Revolution during re-enactment events. Every time we read a history of the American Revolution or watch a recreation of a battle we are theoretically engaging with a different interpretation. Barring an earth-shattering discovery, the historical facts should remain the same, and regardless of the how a source interprets the history, it should be refreshing the public memory of what the war meant, its consequences, and how it affects our modern conception of what it means to be American. Though their interpretation may differ from another group's, re-enactors aim to explore their own analysis of the American Revolution, and to preserve and pass the public memory on to future generations.

### **You Can Recreate The War, But You Can't Fight Any Battles: A Brief History of Re-enactment**

Although our modern conception of re-enactment did not begin until after the Civil War, similar practices and events involving recreations of the past date back to the early nineteenth century. Most early re-enactments were referred to as "historical pageants," dramatic,

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<sup>27</sup> Maxine N. Lurie, "New Jersey: Radical or Conservative in the Crisis Summer of 1776?" in *New Jersey in the American Revolution*, ed. Barbara J. Mitnick (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rivergate Books, 2005), 38.

commemorative re-tellings of past events usually associated with a large, communal festival or celebration. The earliest indication of American Revolutionary War re-enactment dates back to 1822, when “twenty American Revolutionary War veterans engaged in a re-enactment of their 1775 clash with British troops at Lexington.”<sup>28</sup> The context of this event is unclear, but it is likely that it may have performed as a commemorative demonstration. Following this, Revolutionary War re-enactment drops off of the historical radar until the late twentieth century. Although evidence shows that traditions of “[processions] through the streets of floats...on historic occasions” with “live people trying to look like dead ones” continued, re-enactments are not often discussed.<sup>29</sup> More often than not, re-enactments and historical pageants are mentioned in passing as having occurred in conjunction with an event, but are not described in much detail.

So if large-scale Revolutionary War re-enactment all but disappeared from the historical record, where can we look to find out how it made its great comeback in the twentieth century? Interestingly, our modern perception of what a re-enactment entails stems from an anniversarial Civil War reunion. In 1909, the Pennsylvania General Assembly began to plan an event to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gettysburg. Forty thousand Civil War veterans from both sides expressed interest in the event, and four years later, the reunion became a reality. The celebration was scheduled to last four days, and would include occasions like the dramatic reading of the Gettysburg address, but the headlining event – a re-enactment – was set to happen on the third day of the reunion. It was during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion in 1913 that the veteran soldiers first lined up to re-enact Pickett’s Charge. However, rather than shooting at one another, soldiers from opposing sides charged, and then shook hands and embraced,

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<sup>28</sup> Jenny Thompson, *War Games; Inside the World of Twentieth Century Re-enactors* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), xiii.

<sup>29</sup> Ralph Davol, *A Handbook of American Pageantry*, 2nd ed. (Taunton, Massachusetts: Davol Publishing Company, 1914), 27.

symbolically eliminating any remaining feelings of animosity between the Union and Confederate armies. The event went over so well, that a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion was planned for 1938. Of course, by the this time, the number of Civil War veterans in attendance had dwindled as a result of failing health and death. Many of the veterans' children and grandchildren attended the event to commemorate their deceased and ailing relatives. According to Abigail Ellen Green, these two reunion events are the forerunners of modern re-enactments. By the centennial anniversary of Gettysburg in 1963, one could hardly call the event a reunion; even those Civil War veterans with extreme longevity had died. This event, therefore, marked the first large-scale, total re-enactment.<sup>30</sup>

But what of the American Revolution? The 1963 Civil War centennial had sparked interest in American history, and the thought of the impending Revolutionary War bicentennial anniversaries were on the edge of American national consciousness. According to Michael Clark, event coordinator of the New Windsor Cantonment Historic Site, "The Bicentennial really gave everything a boost, a much needed boost. ...It was far more common – and still is more common today – to find people who re-enact the Civil War, because there were a lot more people [who] could tie their ancestry to it. The Revolutionary War seemed a little less personal."<sup>31</sup> However, as 1976 drew ever closer, American interest in early national history began to come alive. To accommodate growing public interest, the federal government established the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) in December of 1973. ARBA served as an independent federal agency solely dedicated to commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

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<sup>30</sup> Abigail Ellen Green, "The History and Growth of Civil War Re-Enacting and Its Affect on Public Interpretation of the American Civil War" (Dissertation, George Washington University, 2005), 2-9.

<sup>31</sup> Michael J. Clark and Chad Johnson, Personal Interview – New Windsor Cantonment Historic Site, 16 October 2009.

American independence.<sup>32</sup> Communities, schools, social groups and others could apply with their local ARBA branches for “Bicentennial” status by demonstrating that they had some historical connection to the American Revolution, and furthermore, that they had plans to hold at least one large commemorative event. According to “The ‘Phineas Fayette’ Handbook for Bicentennial Planners, bicentennial participants’ plans had to fall into one of three, pre-approved thematic categories in order to be taken into consideration.”<sup>33</sup> *Heritage ’76* accommodated events focused on “the unfolding panorama of our nation’s history over the course of two centuries” and included events like the restoration of historic buildings or dedications of public spaces in honor of the Bicentennial. *Festivals U.S.A.* was designed to include commemorative public programming, such as July 4<sup>th</sup> parades and county fairs. Lastly, *Horizons ’76* aimed to “look ahead into our third century and select goals to make America a ‘More Perfect Union.’” Americans were encouraged to forge strong communal bonds by building new health and recreation centers and public spaces.<sup>34</sup>

The increased focus on the American Revolution should have been a boon for Revolutionary War re-enactors who wanted to participate in the bicentennial with as much verve and vigor as Civil War re-enactors had participated in their own centennial celebrations. By working together as a faux battalion, Revolutionary War re-enactors formed a community and

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<sup>32</sup> The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, established July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1966, preceded the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA). For all intents and purposes, the administrative functions of these organizations were the same. ARBA was disbanded September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1977, “pursuant to provisions contained in its establishing act.” Robert B. Matchette, “Records of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration [ARBA]” in “Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States” National Archives and Records Administration, <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/452.html>.

<sup>33</sup> The ‘Phineas Fayette’ Handbook was a publication created by the Fayette County Development Council. All Bicentennial celebration plans had to be approved at the state, regional and national level before Bicentennial Community status was awarded. Although ‘Phineas Fayette’ was distributed to a limited audience, namely those communities in Fayette County, Pennsylvania who wished to participate in the Bicentennial, the guidelines included served as an outline for how to design celebrations that would be approved by all of the aforementioned councils. For selected pages of the Handbooks, see Appendix 2, Figures 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5.

<sup>34</sup> Fayette County Development Council, “The Phineas Fayette Handbook for Bicentennial Planners,” ed. Bicentennial Pennsylvania 1976 (Uniontown, Pennsylvania: The Bicentennial Coordinating Committee, 1976).

they often modeled themselves after a true historical regiment; these qualities hypothetically fit them in to both the *Festival U.S.A.* and *Heritage '76* themes. Even in the 1970s, re-enactors strove to be as historically accurate as possible, and re-enactment events could have fit seamlessly into all kinds of bicentennial events, including community pageants, parades and county fairs. However, ARBA rules essentially cut re-enactment groups off at the knees by preventing re-enactors from participating to their full capabilities. A memo for ARBA regional directors entitled “Event Recognition Guidelines” explicitly stated, “There are certain events which by their nature should be excluded from recognition.” “Battle re-enactments” was the first event listed.<sup>35</sup> This restriction likely had to do with National Park Service’s strict safety regulations and the cumbersome permit and weapons inspection processes associated with events that make use of historic weaponry and black powder shots.<sup>36</sup>

ARBA’s refusal to allow such demonstrations hurt volunteer re-enactment groups because, according to Dr. Cathy Stanton of Tufts University, “reenactment began and continues to be centered around portrayals of battle and military history. The central ethos of the reenactment community is strongly masculine and military.”<sup>37</sup> While some re-enactments may focus on civilian or camp life, battles and warfare are major components of Revolutionary War re-enactment. Of the re-enactments I attended as part of this project, half involved either a tactical military and weapons demonstration, or the direct recreation of components of major military

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<sup>35</sup> American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, “Event Recognition Guidelines” in *Exclusions*, (Philadelphia: American Revolution Bicentennial Administration Regional Directors, 1976), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Today, re-enactors who wish to perform artillery demonstrations on National Park property must submit to the supervision of NPS Black Powder Safety Officer. The commanding officer is required to fill out a permit request and submit it to NPS no less than two weeks before any events. National Park Service, “Historic Black Powder Safety Regulations,” U.S. Department of the Interior, <http://www.nps.gov/mima/supportyourpark/upload/Historic%20Black%20Powder%20Weapons%20Safety%20Regulations.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Cathy Stanton, “Re-enactors in the Parks: A Study of External Revolutionary War Re-enactment Activity at National Parks,” (Boston: National Park Service, 1999), ix.

campaigns.<sup>38</sup> According to Christian H. Moe, et al, commemoration is a “major recurrent goal of the community keen about celebrating and preserving its heritage; for instance, the anniversary of its founding, its achievement of statehood, or the fighting of a famous battle nearby.”<sup>39</sup> Using Moe’s laundry list of reasons for putting on a commemorative event, a full American Revolutionary War re-enactment, including both a camp *and* a battle event could have provided bicentennial communities with a richer understanding of exactly what measures early American citizens took to secure independence. Full re-enactments could have added new meaning and depth to the celebrations by forcing Americans to reflect upon the modern and historical meanings of “patriotism” or to consider the fact that the nation’s founding was not necessarily an easy or peaceful occurrence. By disallowing battle re-enactment and thusly weakening the impact of celebratory re-enactments, the ARBA coordinators missed a golden opportunity for the American public to intellectually capitalize on the revived historical interest through “living history” performances.

This prohibition coupled with the academic’s community’s distaste for re-enactors has caused some re-enactment circles to feel as though their research endeavors and efforts to preserve history have been written off as farcical or weird. When asked to give an example of this marginalization many re-enactors will point to Tony Horwitz’s *Confederates in the Attic*, a Pulitzer Prize winning travelogue that chronicles the ventures of “hardcore” Confederate Civil War re-enactors. Re-enactors of all time periods admit to disliking this book, claiming that it portrayed them as “buffoons and disconnected historical extremists.” Horwitz and his readers

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<sup>38</sup> For example, Jerusalem Mill’s event *The British Are Coming!* (October 10 – 11, 2009) involved daily marching drills, which culminated with a military spectacle ranging somewhere between a large skirmish and small battle. Washington’s Crossing (December 25, 2009) was followed the next day with the re-enactment of the Battle of Trenton.

<sup>39</sup> Christian H. Moe, Scott J. Parker and George McCalmon, *Creating Historical Drama: A Guide for Communities, Theatre Groups and Playwrights*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 23.

have accordingly become the poster children for academics and the public turning up their noses at re-enactment and painting it as “a fake branch of historical interpretation.”<sup>40</sup>

When asked to describe what differentiates historical re-enactors and their period events from other costumed events, Travis Shaw said,

“There’s a tendency for people to kind of lump re-enactors in with Renaissance Faire people, and the people that go to [science fiction, comic book and Anime] conventions...and there may be a little bit of that, but all in all, most re-enactors tend...to take themselves more seriously. Any good re-enactor should, I think, be taken more seriously because it’s not a fantasy thing necessarily that you’re doing. It’s trying to portray life as it was. It’s trying to portray certain historical things.”<sup>41</sup>

Revolutionary War re-enactment strives to do what The American Revolution Center recommends: “to educate Americans about the important principles upon which this nation was built and by which it thrives.”<sup>42</sup> While the ARBA regulations and modern distaste for “hardcore” re-enactors are probably not *the* reasons for Americans’ lack of understanding of the Revolutionary War, they could certainly be considered contributing factors to the public’s Revolutionary amnesia because they prevent re-enactors from engaging with others on their own terms.

### **Revive, Relive, Remember: The Three R’s of Public Memory and How Re-enactment Uses Each**

There are many ways to refresh the public memory of the past, from teaching the subject matter in schools to independently reading related source material during one’s free time. Despite the variety of potential approaches, I suggest that three steps – Revival, Reliving, and Remembrance – can be used identify the most basic processes occurring during the revival of public memory, regardless of remembrance method employed.

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<sup>40</sup> Green, 29-31.

<sup>41</sup> Travis Shaw, Personal Interview – 1<sup>st</sup> Virginia Regiment, 8 October 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Cole, 12.

The first R – Revival – refers to the need for Americans to revive their interest in American history. It does not matter where this revival comes from, so long as it is deeper than a detached or passing interest. In fact, many American Revolutionary War re-enactors try to revive public interest in eighteenth century history by recruiting new regiment members from the crowds.<sup>43</sup> Others revive interest by using tangible props in conjunction with person-to-person contact. When answering questions, interacting with members of the public attending the re-enactment event, or mingling with other re-enactment groups, a re-enactor may use a prop to demonstrate his points, or may recommend someone check out a new source, like a book or documentary. These displays and exchanges of ideas can spark one's interest in a new aspect of the Revolution or simply help to maintain interest in the subject matter.

The second R – Reliving – involves making a personal connection to a past time period, understanding how it differs from modern life, and momentarily considering or imagining oneself in that situation. Oftentimes material culture can act as a catalyst to a brief reliving experience. For example, when examining historical women's clothing, a member of the public can assess the differences between the fashions of the eighteenth century and the modern era. She can intuit that had she lived two hundred years earlier, the garb she would don would be quite different from what she is wearing today. The act of contemplating how this might feel different – for example, how a bodice or stay might hinder motion or weigh more than modern undergarments – and imagining oneself in such historical circumstances elicits a brief moment of intellectual reliving.

However, re-enactors take this second R quite literally. For participants in re-enactment groups, a fully immersive experience is the most comprehensive means of reliving an historical

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<sup>43</sup> During a re-enactment event at Jerusalem Mill (October, 2009), I observed an officer's meeting before the battle. During this time, British Brigade Deputy Commander Lieutenant Colonel James McGaughey reminded participants to "have fun, and get some new recruits."



moment, because it not only engages the participant intellectually, but because it is also a sensory experience. Re-enactors aim to completely throw themselves in an historical moment, attempting to actually relive the past through a physical experience whereby one loses oneself in the moment and forgets that he lives during the modern era. Within the re-enactment community, this kind of total historical immersion is often referred to as a “period rush.” According to Revolutionary War re-enactor Travis Shaw, having a full-blown period rush is quite a rare and thought-provoking experience. Describing the first times it happened to him, Shaw said,

“For those moments [when I was experiencing the rush] I forgot that it was 2008. I forgot where I was and I think I experienced, at one point, genuine terror, and, at one point, genuine elation. I sat down afterwards and I thought about it and I was pumped up on this adrenaline high. [Then] I was like, you know, that was a lot of *fun*, but that could have been *real*. I had another moment at a more recent event where I was standing fifty feet from a British soldier. He leveled his musket at me, and I made eye contact with him. I saw him, he saw me, and he pulled the trigger. For a split second I thought, you know if this were real, I’d be *dead* right now. And that scared the hell out of me. ... You know it’s not real, but there are points when your mind tricks your body and you react like it’s real...At the same time you forget, but the thing that really sinks in is afterwards when you really think about what just happened, and think about what it would have been like for an actual Revolutionary War soldier.”<sup>44</sup>

This kind of post-rush reflection is what makes reliving the second key component to remembrance. By stepping into the shoes of a Continental soldier, or other Revolutionary characters, one can experience a rough approximation of their lifestyle – their social conditions, fears, and motivations. Reliving brings and certain degree of tangibility and texture to the history that cannot necessarily be otherwise gained through traditional historical interpretation.

The final R – Remembrance – is the most simple of the three. It asks that a participant in public memory use the first two R’s to recall their experiences, and share them with others. In the same way one may recall the chronology of a July 4<sup>th</sup> or Thanksgiving Day parade and then discuss the importance of why certain themes were present – which floats came first, and why

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<sup>44</sup> Shaw.

the marching bands played certain songs – one can discuss history and historical events. By contemplating the past through an immersive experience, or expressing an interest in a time period with another person or group, an individual can help to keep history relevant.

### **Re-enactments and Re-enactors: Who They Are, What They Do**

A re-enactor can help to preserve public memory by using their person and the immediate space around them to re-create a past time period. While the end goal for all re-enactors is basically the same – interpret the past and preserve public memory – there are many varieties of re-enactment and re-enactors. For example, re-enactors have many different levels of professional training. Some are paid by museums or historical institutions, some volunteer their time, while others re-enact as a hobby on weekends. Re-enactors also go by many different names; whereas some prefer to be called amateur historians, others choose to be called historical interpreters, docents or living historians. Re-enactors' specialty time periods span all regions and eras, and re-enactment events cover all manners of history from the times of the Roman gladiator up to – and eventually, most likely beyond – World War II. Most re-enactors are extremely knowledgeable about their chosen time period, and can accurately convey all kinds of information, from an average individual's lifestyle, to community cooking trends, and military tactics.

Interestingly, when asked how they became involved in re-enactment, many re-enactors said they were simply “interested in the time period.”<sup>45</sup> Others gave more detailed answers. During an email correspondence, Jon Schmidt of the Seventh Virginia Regiment wrote,

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<sup>45</sup> For a more complete breakdown of how re-enactors reported becoming interested in the hobby, see Appendix 1, Figure 1.1. Madeline Karp, “American Revolution Re-Enactors: Survey for a Senior Thesis” (Washington, DC: Members of the Yahoo Group “RevList,” 2009).

“I just finished reading the book, *Almost a Miracle*, by John Ferling. At the end of the book I came across a passage that really struck chord with me. If anyone asks me why I'm into re-enacting, this is what I'd hope I'd say. The scene is Fraunces Tavern. The war is over, and Gen. Washington has invited his officers to dinner so that he could say farewell to them. It is a tear-filled, emotional meeting. John Ferling writes: ‘Each knew that he would never again savor the warm pleasures of camaraderie, the pulsating thrill of danger, the rare exhilaration of military victory that would come from serving the infant nation in its quest for independence.’ That sums it up for me.”<sup>46</sup>

Although many American Revolutionary War re-enactors are wholly committed to re-creating late eighteenth century America, many re-enactors generally agree that it is common practice to shop around for a time period. Re-enactor Travis Shaw admitted to having participated in other re-enactments, and also held that participating in multiple time periods is quite normal. “Probably the majority of Revolutionary War re-enactors either started out in a different time period or still do other time periods as well. The farthest [in the future] I’ve gone is some [War of] 1812 stuff. I have no interest in Civil War, World War II, anything like that, but I know plenty of people [who] do different time periods.”<sup>47</sup> Adam Young of the First New Jersey Regiment agreed, “It’s very typical for re-enactors to either have different impressions within one hobby, or to have multiple re-enacting hobbies. I’ve done World War II before, I’m getting into Roman and Gaul re-enacting, now I have Revolutionary War under [my] belt.” Young’s fellow New Jersey re-enactors, Daniel Kaluhiokalani and John Funk of the First New Jersey agreed, listing the War of 1812, the French and Indian War, the Civil War and even Viking times as periods they have sampled. Said Young, “You can run the gamut.”<sup>48</sup> It’s easy to see that while re-enactors may be in what could be described as a “long-term love affair” with one time period, it is by no means an exclusive or closed relationship. Time-period overlap can, and does, happen.

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<sup>46</sup> Jon Schmidt, E-mail Correspondence – Survey for a Senior Thesis, 13 November 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Shaw.

<sup>48</sup> John Funk, Daniel Kaluhiokalani and Adam Young, Personal Interview – 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> New Jersey Regiments, 9 October 2009.

Most of the time, re-enactors are looking to work with a time period that excites and interests them.

To obtain demographic information solely about American Revolutionary War re-enactors, I posted a poll on RevList, a Yahoo message board and discussion forum that boasts over 2,000 users and subscribers. Of the 130 respondents, 86 reported having a full time profession. Surprisingly, only 12 percent of those professionals stated they worked in the “field of history,” with the majority working either in museums, or as history teachers. Interestingly, despite these respondents’ affirmations of working in history, 40 percent said they would consider themselves “amateur” rather than “professional” historians.<sup>49</sup> The respondents who said they did not work in history reported working in variety of other professional fields including “Business” (18.3 percent), “Computer Technology” (12.7 percent), and “Vocational Trade or Craft” (11.3 percent).<sup>50</sup> Of the ten respondents who claimed they were students, six reported they were undergraduates, two reported they were doctoral candidates, and six also reported studying American history.<sup>51</sup> Although the results come from a small pool, the survey indicates that the majority of re-enactors are neither academically nor professionally trained to work in public history, but rather, are a small subset of the public themselves.

Despite the fact that they are members of the public, re-enactors are generally more knowledgeable in Revolutionary history than the general public, and often characterize themselves as “amateur historians.” This “amateur” distinction creates an interesting scholarly dynamic: professional historians’ and re-enactors’ research questions are often totally different,

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<sup>49</sup> Karp, “American Revolution Re-enactors.” See Appendix 1, Figure 1.4.

<sup>50</sup> Other responses included “Government/Law Enforcement” (9.9 percent), “Medicine” (8.5 percent) and “Teaching/Education Other Than History” (7 percent). Thirty-one percent of the respondents said they had “Other” professions, and reported working as office managers, in human services, as naval architects, and my personal favorite response as a “Master Bread Baker.” *Ibid.* See Appendix 1, Figure 1.5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

and by calling themselves amateurs, re-enactors acknowledge that they often are not the final word in historical research. However, where professional historians look to intellectually link overarching historical themes, re-enactors look to root out historical details within specific eras. Re-enactors often appear willing to use academic sources to verify their own research, but claim that academics rarely turn to re-enactors to check facts. Says Travis Shaw,

“I think both sides would be served well if there was some common ground. I think both [historians and re-enactors] could learn a lot [from each other]. Re-enactors certainly could learn a lot if they did more work with academic historians...and in some cases, academic historians could learn a little bit from re-enactors. You know, there is certainly a lot to be said for actually doing some of the things that [historians] talk about. I mean, you haven’t lived until you’ve fired a cannon. Come on.”<sup>52</sup>

Collaboration between re-enactors and professional historians is admittedly rare; however, both sides could provide each other with necessary information. Where academic historians can provide thematic context, re-enactors can provide enriching details. Working together would help to provide a more complete picture of history.

A good number of re-enactors dedicate hours of their time to the hobby as if they were professional historians; however, the time they spend researching or performing at events is their own. Many regiments do receive a stipend to cover group travel and maintenance expenses for community property; however, individual re-enactors generally do not earn income off of event attendance. Most would probably argue that the intellectual profits (new historical knowledge gained from interacting with other hobbyists) and the social networking benefits are reward enough. Glenn Porter, president of the Friends of Jerusalem Mill likened participating in a re-enactment group to having a “band of brothers” experience.<sup>53</sup> “You’re out there, you’re counting on the other person to ‘protect’ you, and you have an obligation to [your fellow soldiers].”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Shaw.

<sup>53</sup> See William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act 4, Scene 3 “St. Crispin’s Day Speech”

<sup>54</sup> Glenn Porter, Personal Interview – Friends of Jerusalem Mill Foundation, 10 October 2009.

Porter's assertion suggests that within each re-enactment group there is a degree of trust and accountability for other members' welfare. The knowledge that a group functions like a battalion adds a layer of camaraderie to a group's historical interpretation.

Further underscoring the layperson's ability to participate in history was the response to the question "From a modern-day perspective, what role do you primarily play within the group?" Eighteen percent said they acted as the group's "Historian/Researcher," a number representing more than twice the number of people who said they "worked in the field of history."<sup>55</sup> This disconnect in numbers strongly indicates that at least some of the research done for re-enactment groups is not prepared by professional historians. When asked what sources she used in her research, Marie Caron of the First New Jersey Regiment said,

"Good sources are more experienced people that you trust...but old fashioned digging through library research, [and] a lot of original documents are posted online...you go to symposiums and seminars and they'll have teachers there who will talk about the period and have things that you can handle and look at. It's pretty much the same as learning and subject and it varies [depending upon] where you are a lot of times [with regards to] what you have access to."<sup>56</sup>

Many re-enactors often cite the Internet, or books available in public libraries as their sources. When asked what book they would recommend to an interested visitor, many times re-enactors cited Joseph Plumb Martin's *Private Yankee Doodle; Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier* not only because it is an easily accessible book, but because it is also a well known primary source. Martin's narrative recounts his time as a Continental soldier with the 8<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Regiment, and is, at times, rather graphic when describing his experiences. Many re-enactors use this work as the basis of their own interpretations.

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<sup>55</sup> Karp, "American Revolution Re-enactors."

<sup>56</sup> Marie L. Caron, Julie Phillips, Melissa Stolfi and Heather Vogeley, Personal Interview – Women of the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Jersey Regiment, 11 October 2009.

The availability of such sources is vital to this kind of historical research, especially when one again considers that most re-enactors are not professional historians. Some take more initiative than others, spending time in local and regional archives. However, what would be considered the most useful sources are not always easily at the public's disposal. Heather Vogeley of the First New Jersey recounted her attempts to use a Smithsonian collection in her research about eighteenth century garments.

“I actually saw this quilted outfit in the Snowhill Manor collection online for the first time.<sup>57</sup> ...It's this quilted [wool] jacket, and a matching quilted petticoat. The jacket's got a hood on it and I was just so fascinated with that. So I decided to kind of recreate it, but I'm going to make it without the hood. ...I guess I could go over to the Smithsonian [to look at their collection of extant garments], but I've called them before and they're really hesitant to open up their collection to anybody. And I actually [said to them], ‘Well, why do you have it there if you're not going to show [the public] what you have?’”<sup>58</sup>

To complete her project Vogeley said she used books written by costume designers and fashion historians – specifically those of British clothing historian Janet Arnold – who had also looked at the Snowhill collection and deconstructed the garments to create patterns available to the community. Theoretically, anyone with an Internet connection or public library card could purchase or borrow a copies of these books, and could make their own historically accurate eighteenth century garb.<sup>59</sup> The point of mentioning her sources when someone admires her craftsmanship is that any resource Vogeley used in her own research should similarly be available to anyone who is interested in the subject matter, regardless of whether or not they are a re-enactor.

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<sup>57</sup> Snowhill Manor is a property in Gloucestershire, England. It is a National Trust Property, and is currently functioning as a house museum.

<sup>58</sup> Caron et al.

<sup>59</sup> To check the availability of Heather Vogeley's sources, I performed a quick Internet search of four websites: GoogleBooks, Amazon.com, the American University library consortium catalog and BCCLS, a northern New Jersey public library consortium catalog. The search revealed that Arnold's books are available in “snippet” views on GoogleBooks. Meanwhile Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion 1: 1660 – 1860* is available on Amazon.com in the \$20 range, while BCCLS has one copy available to public library users. The University catalog listed 19 titles by Arnold, some including patterns; others were simply monographs dealing with the history of fashion and clothing design.

Research efforts like Vogeley's and others demonstrate re-enactors' ability to navigate the space in between public and professional history. During the research period of this project, I heard many different sources listed, but never heard mention of exclusive, subscription-based historical databases, or, beyond Vogeley's failed Smithsonian endeavor, of museum archives and off-display collections. Like any other member of the public, re-enactors are largely limited to source material that is widely available, and must become ever more creative when conducting primary and rare source research. Consequently, re-enactors can be much more sympathetic to the difficulties facing amateur historians because they have an understanding of what materials are and are not available to the general population. In this sense, re-enactment's strong grassroots component works in its favor – by helping interested visitors find relevant, interesting and available source materials, re-enactors can help cultivate an intellectual interest in the American Revolution in visitors who might otherwise have given up on researching the eighteenth century for their own edification. Re-enactors can serve as the voice of experience for new, amateur historical researchers.

### **Outward Homogeneity, Hidden Variations**

After watching a re-enactment, one might intuit that re-enactors are a population of likeminded individuals. According to my survey, such an observation would be, by and large, a correct assessment especially when dealing with demographic information. When asked about age and gender, 85 percent of the re-enactors polled said they were male, and 50.5 percent stated they were between the ages of 46 and 60. Questions about race, political and religious views and economic background were not included in the poll, but during re-enactment events I observed that participants were predominately Caucasian, and as the poll indicated, most were full-time,



white-collar professionals. Despite the obvious martial aspects of re-enactments and the assumed militaristic personas of group leaders, most re-enactors had not been in the military. Only one-third of those who were polled said they did have military experience, and while this represents a minority among re-enactors, it is a percentage that is extremely disproportionate to the number of Americans with military experience overall.<sup>60</sup> This two-thirds “civilian” majority sheds some light on group dynamics – when asked what role they play in the group, 40 percent said they were “General Body Members” and when asked what role they played on the field, the majority said they were a “Private,” or rank and file member during re-enactments. Re-enactors with military experience reported portraying officers more often than those without, and all of the re-enactors who claimed to portray a member of the Cavalry member or a Colonel reported being former military personnel.<sup>61</sup>

To an outsider, it may appear that all re-enactors are pretty much the same; they all like the same time period, are involved in the same activity, and they all pretty much read the same sources and tell the same historical story. It’s easy to see how an outside member of the public might think that there are few differentiations among re-enactment groups and events. In fact, this could not be further from the truth. Re-enactment events are as varied as the players themselves. There are four main types of re-enactment events: tactical demonstrations, camps, historically based events and large-scale, multifaceted events. As with any kind of entertainment for the masses, event variation allows for a wider spectrum of visitors to attend. While there are minimal qualitative differences among the different types of re-enactment events, the variation in

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<sup>60</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 1,401,800 Americans were considered on active duty in 2008. Approximately 2,002,852 Americans were considered retired military personnel and 1,099,915 Americans were part of the Reserve Corps. In total, while large, these numbers constitute an estimated 1.5 percent of the 2008 American population. Karp, “American Revolution Re-enactors.” U.S. Census Bureau, “The 2010 Statistical Abstract; The National Data Book,” U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/>.

<sup>61</sup> Karp, “American Revolution Re-enactors.”

setting and programming is important because it encourages re-enactors and visitors alike to address different historical interests.

The first type of re-enactment, tactical demonstration, is based around the use of eighteenth century military tactics and artillery. According to James “Jim” McGaughey, Deputy Commander of the British Brigade re-enactment organization, tactical demonstrations are not necessarily based on a historical battle. Oftentimes this has more to do with event location than knowledge of Revolutionary history. For example, the space that is now Historic Jerusalem Mill Village in Kingsville, Maryland did not actually see any formal Revolutionary War battles, and so to stage the Battles of Bunker Hill or Saratoga would be historically inaccurate. Rather, in these situations, the re-enactors seek to demonstrate a rough approximation of what a battle or skirmish *might* have looked like, had one actually happened there. The military tactics used by the regiments during a tactical demonstration, however, are historically accurate, and re-enactment groups do have historical evidence to back up their drills. However, the tactical logistics, such as where the battle actually happens on the site, how many regiments are involved, and even who wins the skirmish are up to the commanding officers of at the event.<sup>62</sup> It is likely that each side – both Continental and British – will trade off so that each wins at least one skirmish, especially if the event is slated to last more than one day.<sup>63</sup>

The second type of re-enactment, the camp, is meant to portray either civilian lifestyles or soldiers’ encampments during the Revolution. Within this category of re-enactment, there are two types of events: re-enactments where the camp is not a permanent fixture, and re-enactments where the camp is permanent. Impermanent camps are usually held in conjunction with a historic

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<sup>62</sup> One commanding officer from each battalion is typically required to attend an Officer’s Meeting, where a walkthrough of the battle is staged. Officers will head out into the field and scout out the best areas to use during the demonstration. It is at this time that it is decided which side will win. This information is then relayed to the regiment. See Appendix 2, Figure 2.7.

<sup>63</sup> James McGaughey, Personal Communication – Officers’ Meeting, 10 October 2009.

location, and can generally be characterized as a “One Day Only” or special event. The Hermitage Historic House and Museum in Ho Ho Kus, New Jersey puts on several of these events annually, holding weekend-long camps on the museum grounds. While it is not a hard and fast rule, the museums that house these camps generally have a rapport with the re-enactment group participating in the event, and the historical focus is much more local. Working with the New Jersey Militia – General Daniel Heard’s Brigade, Sue Deeks, the event coordinator for the Hermitage said, “Rather than being a Continental Army unit or British Army unit, they’re a New Jersey local militia unit. The big difference is that colonial militias were formed to protect local areas. They were basically state-based and very locally based organizations...During the Revolutionary War most militias [had already been formed] for the defense of states and the defense of communities.”<sup>64</sup> Theoretically, the re-enactors participating in these camps should have a much better understanding of impact that the Revolutionary War’s had on state and local communities. By researching the history of a single county, or a small group of towns within a county, a re-enactor can engage the public in a discussion of what eighteenth century life and circumstances were like when their own backyard played a part in the conflict.

Permanent camps are even more localized. Sites like the New Windsor Cantonment State Historic Site are designated to preserve places that are directly related to the Revolution. Located in southern New York State, New Windsor Cantonment is the preserved site of the Continental Army’s final winter encampment, and everything in the camp is “very specific to one group at one time, the spring of 1783.”<sup>65</sup> Said Michael Clark, New Windsor’s Historic Site Manager,

“We’ve changed the interpretation a number of times since that time, in terms of what the people are wearing, the equipment that’s being used, even the appearances of some of the buildings...of course, we’re updating the story [of the Cantonment] as we get more materials. One of the things that’s happened over the last ten or twelve years is the

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<sup>64</sup> Sue Deeks, Personal Interview – Ho Ho Kus New Jersey Hermitage Museum, 18 September 2009.

<sup>65</sup> Clark and Johnson.

discovery of several diaries and depositions that [were] done after the Revolutionary War by a soldier's wife, all of which...help tell the story of what daily life was like for the people here...Everything [here] is based on either a description, or a surviving example – and there aren't that many surviving examples of something from the Revolutionary War. We've gotten [the historical details] from very general – the Revolutionary War – to very specific. Currently [New Windsor soldiers] dress in the uniform of the Seventh Massachusetts Regiment, which was one from eastern Massachusetts...We chose them because there's a diary of one of the soldiers in the Huntington Library out in California, and there's a drawing that was done of the camp by one of soldiers.”<sup>66</sup>

As with impermanent encampments, an impression as accurate to local history as possible helps to impart specific details about the Revolution. According to Clark, many visitors to the Cantonment say they did not know it was there, despite having lived nearby for years. Others who were aware of the camp's existence admit they did not know it was where the Continental Army spent their final winter season.<sup>67</sup>

The third type of re-enactment, a historically based event, is generally less common than an encampment or tactical demonstration, but is oftentimes more hyped events because it commemorate specific moments during the Revolution. Consequently, the use of props like artillery or domestic utensils can vary depending upon the historical moment being recreated. Most historically based re-enactments try to recreate the series of historical events, as true to the historical record as possible. During the 1976 bicentennial celebrations, a group of 40 men and women spent approximately one month hauling “11 cannon on six horse-drawn sleds and three wagon, one pulled by oxen” from New York State to Massachusetts in a recreation of Henry Knox's original journey from Fort Ticonderoga to Bunker Hill during the winter of 1776.<sup>68</sup> Like most historically based re-enactments, a central figure was cast; in this case William Wilbur of

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<sup>66</sup> Clark and Johnson.

<sup>67</sup> Clark and Johnson.

<sup>68</sup> Margot Hornblower, “Patriots Re-Enact 1776 Trek with Cannon,” *The Washington Post* (1877 - 1993), 24 January 1976, A1, A4.

Hubbardston, Massachusetts was chosen to portray Henry Knox.<sup>69</sup> With the help of fellow volunteer re-enactors from Massachusetts and New York, along with a few Boy Scout Troops, Wilbur tried to recreate the events as faithfully as possible. Not surprisingly, there are logistical constraints on these types of re-enactments –probably the key reason why historically based re-enactments are less popular than camps and tactical demonstrations. Factors like weather conditions and participant enrollment cannot be controlled, and historical inaccuracies like performance times are necessary when trying to accommodate the public while obtaining the maximum amount of re-enactor participation. “We tried to be as authentic as possible,” said George Gatzogiannis, a researcher for the event. “...It’s very difficult. We don’t have the money to go out and create a Cecil B. DeMille production.”<sup>70</sup> To compensate, for the historical deviations, the re-enactors often showcase a particular object or idea, and use this to celebrate the historical spirit of the event. During the Knox re-enactment, a six-pound “George III” cannon original to the 1776 journey acted as the centerpiece. This particular piece of artillery had fallen into the Mohawk River, and lay un-retrieved until 1953.<sup>71</sup> The re-enactors participating in the event were extremely upfront about such deviations from historical record. Spectators were made aware that the cannon did not make it to Massachusetts in 1776, and the Henry Knox had actually had “more than 150 men, 42 sleds and 80 yoke of oxen” to help him move 60 tons of artillery.<sup>72</sup> In highlighting relevant facts and demonstrating eighteenth century technological processes, historically based re-enactment serve as educational tools, and can help shed light on the history of a particular event.

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<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the annual Christmas Day re-enactment of Washington’s Delaware crossing only casts the role of General George Washington. Casting only one or two major roles is common for historically based re-enactments; all other participants play “the generic role of an officer or a troop member without distinction.” Washington Crossing Historic Park, “The Annual Christmas Crossing,” Washington Crossing Historic Park, <http://www.ushistory.org/washingtoncrossing/reenactment/index.htm>.

<sup>70</sup> Hornblower.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

The final type of re-enactment, large-scale events, can be tailored to include components of each of the other types of re-enactment. These re-enactments can span from a single day to a weekend or longer, depending upon the event, and usually have a schedule of events revolving around a dramatic military performance, or tactical demonstration. Typically, there are three sections of a large-scale re-enactment: a camp or demonstration of civilian life, a battlefield, and a craft market or “Sutler’s Row.” The civilian camps and battlefields may be similar to those mentioned above, but are oftentimes much larger and involve more participants. The portrayals of eighteenth century figures is also much more widespread – rather than showing only a Continental or British camp as many small encampment sites are apt to do, large scale re-enactments can accommodate Continental, British, Hessian, French, Spanish, Loyalist and Native American impressions as well. In having such a wide variety of interpretations, large-scale re-enactments can highlight the similarities and differences in camp life and military tactics among the different groups, bringing subtle texture to Revolutionary history.

Sutler’s Row marks one of the largest differences between large-scale events and the other aforementioned styles of re-enactment. While smaller re-enactments may have replicas of period items for sale, Sutler’s Row can be characterized as a full-scale marketplace, where re-enactors and visitors alike can consult with merchants about the historical material culture, and purchase their wares. Many sutlers have experience re-enacting, and work to strike a balance between making others’ impressions as historically accurate as possible, and profiting off of their work. April Thomas, a well-regarded historical seamstress within the re-enactment community says, “Being an actual...merchant, [I] essentially make my living this way. You have to walk a very fine line between informing people and guiding people. ...You have to guide them without actually telling them straight out, ‘What you’re wearing is completely wrong,’ and then again,

...I have a degree in a small aspect of this...but if I have knowledge that I think they should know about, it's here if they want to find it.”<sup>73</sup> Sutler's Row not only acts as marketplace, but also as a place to exchange knowledge and ideas. Visitors are encouraged to ask questions and can often see the merchants engaged in their craft. Again, through demonstration and interaction with historical objects, history gains texture and comes to life. One can see how eighteenth century lifestyle is applicable to his modern day life, and can begin to participate in collective and public memories through the synthesis of this information.

Each style of re-enactment has its strengths. Some focus on local history, while others focus on material culture or military tactics. Although there are often quantitative differences in what subject matter is discussed, participants in each type of re-enactment attempt to maintain a high quality of historical accuracy. Regardless, with all types of re-enactments, the main goal is to bring history to life and to inspire public interest in the American Revolution with fun, family-friendly performances and activities.

### **Ideological Pageantry and Dramatic Patriotism**

As mentioned earlier, historian Geoffrey Cubitt maintains that “memory has become, to all appearances, one of the central preoccupations of historical scholarship” during the past few decades. Quoting Ernest Renan, Cubitt discusses the theory that memory is “at the core of nationality.”<sup>74</sup> Using Cubitt's and Renan's assessments, we can deduce that one's connection to his nationality – or the degree to which he feels patriotic – directly relates to his participation in and understanding of his home nation's public memory. Interestingly, there are two ways one could interpret the term “patriotism” when discussing American Revolutionary War re-

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<sup>73</sup> April Thomas, Personal Interview – Historical Seamstress, 11 October 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Cubitt, 1 and 40.

enactment; there is ideological patriotism as an expression of devotion to one's homeland and dramatic Patriotism which means the act or portraying a Patriot as opposed to a Loyalist, Hessian or British soldier. Both types of patriotism are important components of commemoration during re-enactment events because both forge intellectual and emotional connections to the past.

The first "patriotism" – the support of one's homeland and its associated ideological beliefs – is one of the reasons re-enactments draw visitors. Just as some visitors may attend Civil War re-enactments to understand and commune with the ideology of "Rebel Pride," American Revolutionary War re-enactments ask visitors and re-enactors alike to contemplate at the most basic level what it means to be American. "Unfortunately the American Revolution is becoming more of a footnote in American history," said Mark Crosby, a Colonel with the Royal Artillery and Master Gunner of the British Brigade Organization. He continued,

"Now instead of talking about Lexington and Concord, and Trenton, and Princeton, and Valley Forge, and Brandywine, and Saratoga...the battles and why we got to where we are, [historical education has] become more politically correct [and pacifistic]. ...Well, every major change in our nation's history has come as either a direct or indirect result of armed conflict, starting with our present form of government and our Constitution. Plus, [there is] the fact of how many men gave their lives, so that we can stand here and talk like this and be open and maybe say some things...that aren't popular and disagree with our government. If it hadn't been for [the American Revolution] that never would have happened. We would not have our Constitution; we would not have a First Amendment. I think it's important that this trend keep on. We need to push this."<sup>75</sup>

Others in Crosby's regiment agreed. The American Revolution Center asserts that "many high schools forego teaching about the American Revolution in favor of global studies" and consequently, the historical fact backing up the basic tenets of American ideology and identity is

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<sup>75</sup> Earl Blizzard, Richard Bowers, Mark K. Crosby, James I. Hancock-Crosby, Rex L. Hughes, Jr., Asher Lurie and Joseph M. Wilson, Personal Interview – 43<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of the Foot, Light Infantry, 10 October 2009.



largely being forgotten.<sup>76</sup> Philosophical and emotional patriotism is now largely felt without the foundation of historical fact.

The second “Patriotism” – the dramatic action of portraying a Patriot, militiamen or Continental soldier fighting for independence – is essential to re-enactment. While some re-enactment events may only involve a single regime, such as the re-creation of a regimental camp or the performance of specific a historical event like Henry Knox’s campaign to move 60 cannon from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston, it would not be possible to hold a large scale re-enactments or battles without two opposing sides. Although my poll did not show a straight majority, the most popular portrayal in Revolutionary War re-enactments is that of the American soldier; 46.6 percent of respondents reported that this persona was their primary impression.<sup>77</sup> While some re-enactors choose to research an actual historical person who served in their regiment, more choose to play a generic, unnamed soldier or militiaman. According to Christian H. Moe, et al., maintaining a third person, generic interpretation is often more effective than a first person interpretation.<sup>78</sup> Dramatic pageants or re-enactment should “clarify the development of community life, [which] subordinates the individual...‘the dramatic character is not primary.’ Individual figures come and go with generations.”<sup>79</sup> The lack of individuality can actually help get across the idea of unity. With the exceptions of diarists like Joseph Plumb Martin, most rank and file soldiers’ names are unknown to the public today. However, it is through this anonymity that we can forge the best connections. There is a sentiment that eighteenth century Patriots were the first group to identify as a community of Americans. Although we are separated by more

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<sup>76</sup> Cole, 12.

<sup>77</sup> Karp, “American Revolution Re-enactors.” See Appendix 1, Figure 1.2.

<sup>78</sup> A re-enactor’s impression is called a third person interpretation if he or she maintains personal distance from the historical event and talks to the audience utilizing modern language. A first person interpretation involves taking on a historical character, and speaking to spectators as if one was actually in the Revolution using “I” and “me” to describe events. First person interpretation is much more difficult, and as re-enactor Travis Shaw said in an interview fewer re-enactors can successfully pull off a first person interpretation.

<sup>79</sup> Moe et al., 91.

than two hundred years, the nameless Revolutionary soldiers and countless modern Americans have both identified themselves as part of the same national community.

Furthermore, playing a specific historical figure has the potential to feed into modern mythology, unintentionally ignoring actual historical fact. Of the events I attended during my research period, only Washington's Delaware Crossing featured an identifiable historical figure – John Godzeiba of the Seventh Pennsylvania Regiment was chosen to play General George Washington for the 2009 Crossing event. Godzeiba stood in his boat during the Crossing, and patiently posed for pictures with the public immediately following the re-enactment, but did not directly address the public or answer any questions, thereby avoiding a true first person impression. Again, Moe, et al. suggests this is for the best because Washington can be “a vexing figure to dramatize. ...Rarely does Washington emerge in the drama as anything but a bloodless figure. The myth overcomes the man.”<sup>80</sup> American mythologies are one example of topics that re-enactors should approach with care. Revolutionary myths like Washington being “unable to tell a lie” and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere,” which postdated the Revolution by nearly 100 years, are ingrained in the American consciousness, and do contribute to the definition of American identity. Rarely does it matter that the myths are historically inaccurate; the stories imbue the spirit of the Revolution. Re-enactment similarly aims to capture the character of the war, but it also intends to preserve actual historical fact as part of the public memory of the Revolution. The balance is delicate: the indiscreet explosion of well-loved myths could potentially damage outside public interest in re-enactment, and yet the perpetuation of falsehoods, no matter how well loved, violates re-enactors' mission of dispersing historical fact. Re-enactors portraying Patriots, militiamen and Continental soldiers

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

have the unfortunate undertaking of navigating the treacherous waters of beloved American folklore.

Similarly, re-enactors who portray British soldiers regularly confront the public's impression of them as playing the villains of the Revolution. Says British Colonel Mark Crosby, "[Our modern understanding of the British soldiers] goes back to 'Who writes history?' The winners."<sup>81</sup> Crosby and other members of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of the Foot, Light Infantry and Royal Artillery constantly remind visitors that there are two sides to every story. The Thirteen Colonies were part of the British Empire, and had the Americans lost, what we now call the American Revolution would likely have been characterized as an English civil war. When visitors ask why they would choose to play the "bad guys," Crosby and co-regimental Rex L. Hughes chalk it up to a different sort of patriotism – the patriotism and loyalty some colonists felt towards the British Empire. Said Crosby, "Paul Revere didn't say 'The British are coming,' he said 'The Redcoats are out.' " Responding, Hughes added, "If he'd said that, man, people would have gone, 'You idiot. We're already here.' [Before the Revolution] we were all British. We were all citizens of the King."<sup>82</sup> As mentioned earlier in the discussion of Revolutionary New Jersey, incidents of colonial Loyalism were quite common and yet often go unremembered. Giving the story of British soldiers equal attention in re-enactments brings a new kind of texture to history because it asks the public to consider what historical details we have intentionally omitted from our public memory and why.

When talking to re-enactors portraying Patriots and the British in a one-on-one setting, they are more likely to talk ideology in the historical sense, rather than in the modern sense. The eighteenth century meaning of patriotism – regardless of whether one is discussing American

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<sup>81</sup> Blizzard et al.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

patriotism or British patriotism – can be gleaned from historical research. Modern conceptions of patriotism often present themselves as a thematic overtones in re-enactment events; visitors can consider what being patriotic means to them through the discussion of what it once meant in the eighteenth century. In commemorating the shared American past through dramatic performance, the re-enactors and audience alike should be acknowledging the acts of historical patriotism being recreated, while simultaneously contemplating their own interpretations of patriotism as it applies to modern America.

### **My Buttons are Original: Re-enactors and Material Culture**

One of the many benefits of re-enactment is its ability to provide visual and tangible examples of what life was like in the eighteenth century. According to John Richard Fino, it is this interaction with past objects and elements that are key to making one's Revolutionary War re-enactment experience valuable. Fino's research looked at visitors' experiences within museums that accommodate exhibits with interactive elements. He writes, "Interactive exhibits have been shown to increase audience diversity, the time spent in the exhibit, attracting power, and, importantly, visitor understanding of connections between themes."<sup>83</sup> Re-enactments, when considered as a sort of outdoor exhibition have many of the same benefits. Many visitors to re-enactment events express the feeling that learning about 1770s America is akin to learning about an ancient foreign nation, mainly because the difference between modern American and eighteenth century lifestyles is so stark. This feeling of distance or alienation from the past necessarily provides re-enactors with fodder for engaging the public. Melissa "Missy" Stolfi of the First New Jersey Regiment says,

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<sup>83</sup> John Richard Fino, "The Effects of Human/Object Interaction of Museum Experience Satisfaction" (Dissertation, Clemson University 2008), 80.

“One thing I just like talking about, especially when kids come up [to me] and they’re checking [our camp] out...I just like having them imagine what life was like back then compared to now and how difficult it was. Especially when they see us scrubbing pots or bending over the fire and there is smoke in our faces, and we’re sweaty and dirty, I just ask them to consider having to be like this all the time, not just for the weekend. It’s bearable for us because we’re going to go home [after the event] and take a shower and sleep in a real bed, but [I like visitors] just to really consider how difficult life was. It’s amazing everybody stuck it out as long as they did with the war effort.”<sup>84</sup>

By engaging visitors to the camps in a conversation about the differences between the Revolution and today, re-enactors encourage thought about human and technological progress, and even the values for which the Revolution was fought.

According to Fino,

“Interactives should be seen as tools which can help move the museum along towards its interpretive and experiential goals. ‘Physical interactivity [...] is not a simple and universal prescription for effective learning.’ ...Interpreters must know the purpose of the interactions, the details of how to design the interactive and must include a strong social element. Like other kinds of museum interpretation, an interactive is a means to an end, and must work with, not against, visitor interests and agendas.”<sup>85</sup>

One of the strongest components of a re-enactment event is the fact that it necessitates various types of cognitive interaction. Re-enactors and visitors alike interact not only with each other, but also with tangible historical objects or material culture, and, hopefully, the intellectual and philosophical theories associated with the recreated time period. Perhaps the two most prominent types of interaction at a re-enactment are interpersonal: re-enactors consistently interact with each other throughout the event, but they also strongly encourage visitors to interact with them in the camps and during question-and-answer periods at the end of tactical demonstrations.

During Jerusalem Mill’s *The Redcoats Are Coming!* two-night, two-day camp out experience and re-enactment event, participants interacted with the assumed persona of soldiers during the day, and then casually as friends and comrades in camp after hours. Immersing

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<sup>84</sup> Caron et al.

<sup>85</sup> Fino, 81.

themselves in various aspects eighteenth century life, the re-enactors shot at one another as enemies in the field, inhabited camps equipped with eighteenth century cookware and food supplies, and then, at night held an all-camp eighteenth century dance, including live, contemporaneous music to accompany the period dance steps. By going through the motions of living within a faux eighteenth century community, re-enactors create group camaraderie analogous to a scholarly circle of immersed anthropologists, or historians. The re-enactors are not only co-regimentals, but friends and colleagues as well.

Re-enactors also directly interact with history. Creating and immersing oneself in an authentic atmosphere is critical for many re-enactors looking to have an eighteenth century experience. As the director of the Friends of Jerusalem Mill Foundation, Glenn Porter has served as the site coordinator for his fair share of re-enactment events. “The [Continental Line] and the British [Brigade] are very adamant about what is shown to the public.<sup>86</sup> We’re not to interrupt from the time the camp opens at ten o’clock until four [when the camp closes]; they don’t want any evidence of modern life going on. We even have to deliver the firewood and everything early in the morning, so that when the public gets here [the camp] is already in place.”<sup>87</sup> Once the atmosphere is set, it is up to the participating regiments to use the ambiance to their advantage. Many group members spend time training themselves in proper eighteenth century military tactics, and dry-running drills is a fixed and important ritual, particularly on the mornings of a scheduled battle re-enactment.<sup>88</sup> Martial accuracy is of the utmost importance, and re-enactment groups must know how to drill properly or risk being prohibited from participating in an event.

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<sup>86</sup> The Continental Line and British Brigade represent two umbrella organizations for re-enactors impersonating American and British soldiers, respectively. Each organization has its own rules for membership, minimum accuracy requirements and stipulations regarding camp safety and event scheduling.

<sup>87</sup> Porter.

<sup>88</sup> The British Brigade has several manuals available on their website with proper protocol for Officers’ Sword Drills, Standing Orders, Colors Ceremonies, Musket Drills and Battle Training, among others. The British Brigade, Inc., “The British Brigade,” The Cheshire Group, Inc. Webmaster, <http://britishbrigade.org>.

With the help of the participating regiments, site coordinators are expected to spot and take note of incorrect tactical demonstrations, and either correct inaccuracies, or un-invite persistently anachronistic groups from future event participation, should they continue to spoil the atmosphere for other regiments and visitors.

Dry runs also provide re-enactment groups with the opportunity to work out the mechanics of military tactics and to test claims made about the accuracy of weaponry. According to Joe Seymour and Richard Staron, two British Brigade rank and file soldiers, British re-enactors have recently corrected two long held misconceptions about the British army's tactical maneuvers and artillery firepower. Staron and Seymour maintain that re-enactors portraying British units during the bicentennial would have been hesitant to utilize a "Right About Face" turn on the field, because no one – neither academic historian nor re-enactor – could quite figure out how it worked. It appeared as though performing a Right About Face by simply turning to the right, as it was described in source material, would cause soldiers to bump into one another on the field, thereby creating mass confusion. Demonstrating the various incarnations of the maneuver, Staron and Seymour described a group of British re-enactors taking time to stand out in a field and practice Right About Faces, tweaking various minute details until it worked. The maneuver has now become commonplace for British re-enactment groups, and is mentioned in the British Brigade's tactical manual as a component of the "Forming Three Ranks" battle maneuver.<sup>89</sup> Yet as time consuming as tweaking the right about face maneuver was, Seymour says it cannot compare to the correction of misconceptions about artillery: "The biggest myth we exploded was [the belief that the] Brown Bess was...inferior."<sup>90</sup> While the British army was the finest of the time and their "arms designs were known for their consistency," the quality of

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Joe Seymour and Richard Staron, Personal Communication – British Brigade Encampment, 10 October 2009.

British firearms apparently suffered in the late eighteenth century when manufacture saw “an interim reduction in length and a gradual simplification of the lock and furniture.”<sup>91</sup> By using accurate replica of the Brown Bess on the field and testing it with variables, re-enactors have demonstrated that despite the changes, the musket worked just as well as other contemporary weapons.

Generally, the accuracy of the material culture is as important to re-enactment groups as the accuracy of their military tactics and surrounding atmosphere. As Fino’s model suggests tactiles – reproduction objects one can touch and handle in a didactic setting – can enhance one’s learning experience, and many re-enactors feel that having access to accurate reproduction or period artifacts helps their interpretation. While regiments will often have a store of “loaner” items for new recruits, re-enactors are encouraged to purchase or make their own gear, and owning the most accurate uniforms and weaponry available can be a compulsive interest. Three types of material culture stand out as the most prevalent and beloved re-enactment artifacts: guns, clothes, and food.

For many, eighteenth century armaments are a huge draw to Revolutionary War re-enactment. Daniel Kaluhiokalani of the First New Jersey said he got in to re-enactment because he “was always interested in guns, [ever since] I was a little kid. Flintlocks always intrigued me.”<sup>92</sup> Many re-enactors, Kaluhiokalani included, proudly showcase their arms, and in question-and-answer sessions following battle re-enactments or tactical demonstrations, common topics of conversation include the differences between flintlock muskets and barreled rifles, the amount of time it takes to load and fire an eighteenth century gun, firearm safety and maintenance, and artillery accuracy. Despite the rampant enthusiasm for eighteenth century armaments, most re-

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<sup>91</sup> George Neumann, “Short Land Brown Bess; Brown Bess Muskets Served Both Sides During the American Revolution,” *American Rifleman*, <http://www.americanrifleman.org>.

<sup>92</sup> Funk et al.



enactors agree that the musket is the most expensive element of a re-enactor's uniform, other than cavalymen owning their own horse or the expense of a group-owned material like cookware and fly nets. According to Sue Deeks, a former re-enactor and event coordinator for the Hermitage Museum in Ho Ho Kus, New Jersey, personal arms can run anywhere from six hundred dollars for used equipment to several thousand dollars for a new or custom made musket. "They are all reproductions and they do fire. They just shoot black powder blanks at re-enactments."<sup>93</sup> Of all re-enactment accessories, however, muskets and firearms are probably the most mired in controversy. As key pieces of material culture firearms are locked in an everlasting battle between historical accuracy and economic affordability. John Funk of the Second New Jersey concedes, "I want to say arms [have improved the most over time], but not really. It's pretty much stayed the same. Actually, some of it has gotten worse. People are trying to make muskets [more cheaply], and with more mass production, and the quality suffers. ... You get what you pay for, and that's what it comes down to."<sup>94</sup> Moreover, because the weaponry is such an attraction for both the public and regimental participants, almost all re-enactors take the time to make a public service announcement stressing that, as with modern day firearm ownership, re-enactment artillery is to be treated with care and every safety precaution should be taken.

Food and mealtime rituals are another area of re-enactment where the regimentals strive for historical accuracy. Several re-enactors and specialty merchants have collaborated on period cookbooks, and interpretations of in-camp cooking are common. During *The Redcoats Are Coming!* many re-enactors working with food pointed out Deborah Peterson's Pantry, sutler tent

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<sup>93</sup> Although it is most authentic, black powder usage has caused some issue for re-enactors. Re-enactors are not allowed to stage battles in National or State Parks because it is illegal to fire black powder on these properties. Deeks.

<sup>94</sup> Funk et al.

dedicated to vending historically accurate and hard-to-find ingredients necessary for eighteenth century culinary endeavors.<sup>95</sup> The owner, the eponymous Deborah Peterson, is lauded by many re-enactors as “an amazing resource” when it comes to eighteenth century food. As the Secretary/Treasurer of the educational non-profit organization Past Masters in the Early American Domestic Arts, Peterson, along with President Clarissa Dillon, work to research and disseminate information about eighteenth century domestic life.<sup>96</sup> According to her website, Deborah’s Pantry, Peterson regularly participates in various re-enactment events, putting on Food Symposiums, running workshops and acting as a consultant to food based events.<sup>97</sup> Heather Vogeley of the Second New Jersey revealed that *The Redcoats Are Coming!* event “was supposed to happen in May [2009], and it was going to be the biggest this year.”<sup>98</sup> We were actually given money for this – one thousand dollars – so we were going to have a women’s tea. I was asked to be in charge of that, and so I went to Deb and asked her, ‘What would they have talked about? What would have happened? Should I get some entertainment?’ ...And she said to me, ‘We’d be sitting around gossiping.’ ”<sup>99</sup> Vogeley’s persistence in researching the details of such an event demonstrates re-enactors’ general desire to have as accurate an impression as possible, especially when dealing with ritualized events, like meals and tea parties, that are still recognizable and put into practice in modern society

Food interpretations are not strictly limited to domestic situations, and male re-enactors interpreting soldiers and militiamen like to research and talk about food rations as well. When

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<sup>95</sup> Peterson’s website lists items for sale including specialty period cookware and eighteenth century ingredients, including acorn and rice flours, natural food colorings and various spices. Deborah Peterson, “Deborah Peterson’s Pantry,” KL Martz, Webmaster, <http://www.deborahspantry.com>.

<sup>96</sup> Clarissa Dillon and Deborah Peterson, “Past Masters in Early American Domestic Arts,” KL Martz, Webmaster, <http://www.pastmasters.info>.

<sup>97</sup> Peterson’s early 2010 events included a seminar and two day workshop entitled “Meat!...For use of the table” and the lecture “Packaging in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century,” which dealt with how foodstuffs would have been packaged for sale in the colonial marketplace. Peterson, “Deborah Peterson’s Pantry.”

<sup>98</sup> *The Redcoats Are Coming!* was postponed to October 2009, due to inclement weather.

<sup>99</sup> Caron et al.

asked what he liked to focus on in his interpretations, Adam Young replied, “I actually specialize in food. I try to make our unit impression really focus on the foods [the Continental soldiers] ate. Everybody hates me for it, and I don’t blame [him or her] because it’s garbage – it’s garbage food. It’s tons and tons of beef on top of maybe some flour, and maybe some vinegar to drink. Yum! But if you ask me, yeah, that’s food.”<sup>100</sup> Some re-enactors try to keep their impression going throughout the event, refusing to eat modern food until the camp closes, while others are willing to break interpretation once the public leaves. While tending to the cavalry horses, Bill Ochester, a professional Benjamin Franklin impersonator, and Jack Zarra of the Fourth Continental Legionary Corps sheepishly pointed out some period barrels, placed to look as though they stored horse feed. “We’ve got modern kegs and food stored in there, for [the time] after the public leaves,” they admitted.<sup>101</sup> To involve the public in food consumption and merriment, events sometimes offer period themed fare for visitors’ consumption; during the Washington’s Crossing event, re-enactors kindly offered shivering spectators warm apple cider, free of charge.

Of course, of all objects and artifacts found at a re-enactment, clothing – uniforms and civilian dress alike – is by far the most beloved. In his article “Worn Worlds” Peter Stallybrass discusses the importance of cloth and memory. “The magic of cloth, I came to believe, is that it receives us: receives our smells, our sweat, our shape even. And when our parents, our friends, our lovers die, the clothes in their closets still hang there, holding their gestures, both reassuring and terrifying, touching the living with the dead...Clothes receive the human imprint.”<sup>102</sup> While muskets may be the most expensive component of an interpretation, and food preparation and

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<sup>100</sup> Funk et al.

<sup>101</sup> Bill Ochester and Jack Zarra, “Personal Communication – 4<sup>th</sup> Continental Legionary Corps, Light Dragoons,” 11 October 2009.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Stallybrass, “Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning and the Life of Things,” in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 28-29.

mealtime rituals may take the most practice and finesse, clothes are by far the most popular topic of conversation, and the most widely researched. Says Michael Clark of the New Windsor Cantonment, “There’s a lot that goes into the clothing because that creates the biggest impression on people, and certainly one of the first impressions.”<sup>103</sup>

In 1914, Ralph Davol, author of *The Handbook of American Pageantry* wrote, “...Pocahontas may enter shod in high-heeled shoes; a glimpse of blue jeans may appear under King Philip’s blanket; ...slight historical anachronisms may occur; but the community pageant, as a whole, was never a complete regret, and never failed to inspire finer fellowship.”<sup>104</sup> Many a modern re-enactor would shudder to think that any event would allow such blatant costume inaccuracies. Revolutionary War re-enactors strive for painstaking accuracy when it comes to their clothes, and the researching eighteenth century garb can be an arduous process; unlike re-enactors who focus on the Civil War, Revolutionary War re-enactors do not have source photographs, as chemical photographs were not used until the nineteenth century. Because there are fewer visual references for eighteenth century clothing and military uniforms, many professional seamstresses and tailors rely on extant garments and drawings. April Thomas, a historical seamstress, claimed to rely on everything from high-class portraiture to satirical cartoons that would have been printed in newspapers.

“[The political cartoons] are very, very, good representations of what all classes of people wore, and the artists [who]...drew them were very specific. You can see quite a lot of detail, and it matches up with detail in portraits, so we can tell that people really took their time when they drew these. ...I use [political cartoons] a lot, but mostly [seamstresses and tailors] just go on extant garments in museums.... You’re really pretty much limited by what’s in museums as far as a physical example. Other than that, you try to find as much written documentation from people’s diaries or wills to find out what [people] had and what things were made out of, but it is much more challenging.”

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<sup>103</sup> Clark and Johnson.

<sup>104</sup> Davol, 28.

Because information about eighteenth century clothing is such a popular topic, re-enactors are especially willing to share resources and will readily share tips on how to improve a uniform.

While most re-enactors prefer to consult professional historical seamstresses and tailors about correct details, many learn to dye and sew fabrics by hand so they can make their own clothes. Travis Shaw, a private in the First Virginia, mentioned the difficulty of coming by eighteenth century clothes. “It’s harder to get started in Revolutionary War re-enactment,” he said. “...There are a lot less people [who] supply eighteenth century re-enactors, so most Revolutionary War re-enactors have to make their own stuff.... I learned [how] to sew. I’ve sewn uniforms, I’ve sewn a lot of clothes and I know a lot of other people [who] do too, just because it’s not as available.”<sup>105</sup> During *The Redcoats Are Coming!* re-enactors portraying soldiers with the Second Massachusetts Regiment shared stories of dying their regimental coats together. The historical Second Massachusetts wore coats stolen from the British. To differentiate themselves as Continentals, the soldiers attempted to dye the red coats blue, but ended up with brown. Modern re-enactors tried the process themselves, which sparked epistemological discussions like “How brown is brown?” and “What makes the interpretation of a color historically accurate?”<sup>106</sup> Kirk Dreier, a park naturalist and self-identified living historian, says this attention to detail makes the history of material culture much more tangible. Pointing to his own Native American attire he said, “I’ve learned how to tan deer skins. These [pants] are...tanned in the Native American [style], and I made these and the moccasins myself. So that perspective of knowing exactly how to make some of these period...materials that you’re going to sew and turn into clothing gives you unique perspective. ...We gain perspective that we can pass on.” When asked why the public should care about the clothes, Dreier stated, “[As a visitor

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<sup>105</sup> Shaw.

<sup>106</sup> During a question and answer session following a tactical demonstration at Jerusalem Mill, re-enactors candidly told the story of dying and sewing their uniforms. Getting consistently acceptable coloring was greatly emphasized.

talking to me] you can use your senses; you can see [the clothes], you can touch it and it's being worn by a real person. That makes all the difference in a [visiting] person's learning curve and how they perceive what's going on."<sup>107</sup> The tangibility of fabric brings life striking differences between the forms and functions of eighteenth century and modern clothing.

Of course, the attention to detail was not always at the forefront of historical interpretation. According to Adam Young, "clothing has improved the most. I know that back during the Bicentennial there [were clothes made of] polyester; there were guys wearing gym socks for their regular camp soldier socks. But now there are people [who are] hand-making stuff. There are people who sew coats by full hand stitching, and they're using more [historically accurate] materials because all of this research has [been done]."<sup>108</sup> During an interview at the New Windsor Cantonment, event coordinator Michael Clark and re-enactor Chad Johnson were kind enough to open up the store closets to show examples of Revolutionary costuming through the ages. Wearing the uniform of a Seventh Massachusetts soldier, Johnson pulled out costume reminiscent of the bicentennial – a loud polyester piece with a visible plastic zipper. As Johnson held the garment next to himself for a visual comparison, Clark said, "[This type of clothing] is not something we want seen anymore. ...Just looking at it casually, [you will] notice the difference between what [Chad] is wearing and what is on the hanger. Look at the buttons on his coat and you'll see which specific regiment he represents. The feel of the material is very different: [Chad's] is the nice wool, and this [other piece] is some sort of felt or polyester."<sup>109</sup> Many re-enactors are proud of the details in their uniforms because it holds specific memories of re-enactment events as well as the larger public memory of the Revolution. As Peter Stallybrass

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<sup>107</sup> Kirk Dreier and Winnie Dreier, "Personal Interview – Living Historians" 10 October 2009.

<sup>108</sup> Funk, et al.

<sup>109</sup> Clark and Johnson.

writes, “To think about cloth, about clothes [is] to think about memory.”<sup>110</sup> Such attention to detail not only shows a deep love for re-enacting, but a commitment to conducting quality historical research.

### **Hitting the Glass Ceiling: The Limitations of Re-enactment**

As more research is conducted, Revolutionary War re-enactment has only become more accurate and detailed. However, no matter how historically accurate an interpretation may be, re-enactors face certain unchangeable limitations. Personal and physical attributes like age, race, health and regionality can spoil the accuracy of an interpretation, as can factors like the number of participants. No matter how accurate an interpretation may be, a re-enactor cannot prevent these anachronisms from seeping in to the public’s consciousness. Many try to make up for it by directly addressing the imprecision, and supplying correct information.

Perhaps the most common inaccuracy is age. Approximately 85 percent of the respondents in my poll reported being over the age of forty, and 41 percent said they were over fifty-five. The age range of re-enactors generally aligns with the historical age range of many Loyalists, but it does not as accurately reflect the ages of rank and file Continental and British soldiers or militiamen. According to Charles Neimeyer, “The average Loyalist was sixty years old in 1775.”<sup>111</sup> Historically, “one-third of the soldiers more than forty years of age were officers” but re-enactment shows many of the middle-aged regimentals participating as rank and

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<sup>110</sup> Stallybrass, 29.

<sup>111</sup> Charles Neimeyer, “Town Born, Turn Out; Town Militias, Tories and the Struggle for Control of the Massachusetts Backcountry,” in *War & Society in the American Revolution*, ed. John Resch and Walter Sargent (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 38.

file soldiers.<sup>112</sup> Approximately 38 percent reported portraying Privates, whereas in reality, the older and more well respected one was within the community, the likelier he was to hold a high rank. By 1777, the median age for soldiers on active duty was 23. In his discussion of Massachusetts soldiers, Walter Sargent writes, “A breakdown by percentiles shows that 20 percent of soldiers were thirty-three years of age or older, 20 percent were eighteen and younger, leaving 60 percent between the ages of eighteen and thirty-three...The median age of Continental recruits was twenty-one years, two years younger than the median age for all soldiers.”<sup>113</sup> Likewise, British soldiers were “young men, frequently teenagers, and almost invariably unmarried at the time of enlistment.”<sup>114</sup> In the years immediately following the Revolution – 1794 to be more specific – the average age of a British recruit was also 23.<sup>115</sup> As stated earlier, very few re-enactors are actually of accurate age. Depending upon one’s level of dedication, re-enactment can become an extremely expensive hobby, and 67 percent of the re-enactors polled claimed to attend “5 or more” re-enactments annually.<sup>116</sup> It is likely that potential re-enactors or “recruits” are unable to participate because of unbreakable commitments like post-secondary education or a lack of financial means.

The health of a re-enactor is also an uncorrectable anachronism. In his review of “Medical Men in the American Revolution, 1775 – 1783” George C. Dunham writes, “typhus was the most prevalent disease among the American troops, and...intestinal diseases and smallpox also exacted a terrible toll in lives and health.”<sup>117</sup> In 1775, men who enlisted were relatively healthy. According to historian Amy Becker the average rate of sickness hovered

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<sup>112</sup> Walter Sargent, “The Massachusetts Rank and File of 1777,” in *War & Society in the American Revolution*, ed. John Resch and Walter Sargent (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 57.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>114</sup> Stuart Reid, *British Redcoat: 1740 – 1793* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1997), 3.

<sup>115</sup> Stuart Reid and Graham Turner, *British Redcoat, Volume 2: 1793 – 1815* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2000), 7.

<sup>116</sup> Karp, “American Revolution Re-enactors.”

<sup>117</sup> George C. Dunham, “Medical Men in the American Revolution, 1775 – 1783,” *American Journal of Public Health and Nation’s Health*, 22, no. 10 (1932), 1113-1114.



around 13.8 percent. Following the smallpox outbreak in 1776, the number of sick men rose to 16.6 percent, and by 1778, the number of ill soldiers serving in the Continental Army was a whopping 35.5 percent.<sup>118</sup> Although historians know that disease was a huge factor in overall casualties, it is difficult to pin down an exact number. Medical historian James Gibson says that the U.S. War Department statistics indicate “a loss of 10,000 men from sickness and wounds.”<sup>119</sup> While almost all re-enactment groups portray deaths, most are battlefield deaths, unrelated to disease.

Typhus and smallpox, once nearly unavoidable, are now all but eliminated from American life. Additionally, many re-enactors have to be cleared by their personal physicians in order to participate in certain events, like the re-enactment of Washington’s Delaware Crossing. Participants are required to include “a doctor's certificate attached to [their] registration paperwork stating [they] are physically capable to take part in this activity.”<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, re-enactors who are seriously injured or who have contracted a contagious illness are likely to be discouraged from participating in re-enactment events, as a precaution against spreading infection to his fellow regimentals and the visiting public. Consequently, it is nearly impossible for re-enactors to adequately portray the contraction and spread of disease, as it would have been during the Revolution. Many re-enactors are the picture of health, and so must rely on simply describing eighteenth century disease and medical practice.

Desertion rates and issues of bravery often come up in re-enactments. According to Glenn Porter of the Friends of Jerusalem Mill Foundation,

“Certainly there are historic examples of people who ran [away] during the Revolutionary War. No one’s perfect. So as far as the re-enactment is concerned, maybe you’re not

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<sup>118</sup> Amy M. Becker, “Smallpox in Washington’s Army: Strategic Implications of Disease During the American Revolutionary War,” *The Journal of Military History*, 68, no. 2 (2004), 392.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 391.

<sup>120</sup> Washington Crossing Historic Park.

getting the proper feel for the fear that [the soldiers] must have felt. All of these [re-enactors] are certainly going to be brave. There's nobody shooting real bullets. Everybody's going to obey orders. So in that way, that might be a flaw with re-enactments...that might be the biggest flaw. ...Obviously all of these guys talk very bravely...they're really into it, and the idea of fear isn't conveyed to anybody."<sup>121</sup>

Desertion was a fairly common occurrence during the American Revolution. In his article "A Footnote on the Deserters from the Virginia Forces during the American Revolution," Arthur J. Alexander writes that "it has been conservatively estimated that at least every other militiaman, and every third Continental who saw service during the Revolution fled the service."<sup>122</sup>

Re-enactors rarely – if ever – show anyone running away from battle, or hanging back in camp during a skirmish. Revolutionary War re-enactment is small compared to Civil War and even twentieth century war re-enactments. The lack of desertion portrayals may stem from a lack of participants; re-enactment groups often need full member participation to create a robust looking firing line. As mentioned earlier the military aspect of re-enactment is a huge draw for many participants. To play a deserter might interfere with a re-enactor's own process of reliving the military history. As the Three R's model demonstrates, part of Remembrance is reliving the moment in which you are interested. A re-enactor interested in military tactics and Revolutionary warfare could not gain the experience he's looking for should he desert. Furthermore, in large re-enactment events, desertion would probably go unnoticed by the spectators. As audience members, the public looks for spectacle like cannon fire and marching, so portraying desertion would thus be a waste of time, manpower and in addition to failing to meet the audience's expectations.

Issues of minority participation come up with re-enactment as well. While there are minority-based re-enactment groups – The Continental Line lists the Regimiento Fijo de la

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<sup>121</sup> Porter.

<sup>122</sup> Arthur J. Alexander, "A Footnote of Deserters from the Virginia Forces During the American Revolution," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 55, no. 2 (1947), 138.

Luisiana Española, a Puerto Rico-based re-enactment group representing Louisiana, in the “Southern Units” section of its website – groups dedicated to, or single members within groups specifically representing African Americans few and far between.<sup>123</sup> In reality, free and enslaved African Americans played an important role in the Revolution. “As the war dragged on, military necessity forced the British and then, more reluctantly, the Americans to muster black slaves into their armies by offering them freedom in exchange for their services.”<sup>124</sup> Although the Continental Congress “formally declared all blacks, slave or free, ineligible for military service” in November 1775, evidence shows that black militiamen had already aided patriot forces during Lexington and Concord, and Bunker Hill the previous April and June, respectively.<sup>125</sup> However, African American participation in the Revolution continued, despite the enlistment ban. Sylvia Frey of Tulane University writes, “When in 1777 Congress began to impose troop quotas on the states, a number of New England towns and state governments began quietly enrolling blacks, although their enlistment was not yet legally sanctioned.”<sup>126</sup>

According to re-enactor Sue Deeks, re-enactment is predominately a “white, male hobby,” and she expressed her desire to see more accurate racial portrayals in re-enactments, especially because the region in which she now works and once represented as a re-enactor – Bergen County, New Jersey – had widespread slavery before and after the Revolution. Deeks suggested that African-American re-enactors might prefer Civil War re-enactment to Revolutionary War re-enactment because of the Civil War’s historical position as an extremely political and pivotal moment in African American history. I did not meet or see any African

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<sup>123</sup> The Regimiento Fijo de la Luisiana Española, which translates to The Fixed Regiment of Spanish Louisiana, is the only immediately apparent minority re-enactment group listed on the Continental Line’s webpage. The Continental Line, Inc., “The Continental Line,” <http://www.continentalline.org>.

<sup>124</sup> Ira Berlin, “The Revolution in Black Life,” in *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution, 1760 - 1791*, ed. Richard D. Brown (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 276.

<sup>125</sup> Sylvia R. Frey, “Slavery Attacked and Defended,” in *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution, 1760 - 1791*, ed. Richard D. Brown (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 274.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 275.

American re-enactors during the research period, and none of the survey respondents identified themselves as minorities or chose to discuss African American issues in free answer questions, so the information available is currently limited.

Regionalism can also be a limiting factor when it comes to the effectiveness of a re-enactment. Revolutionary War re-enactment events are predominately, if not exclusively, held in areas where the Revolution historically took place. Neither The Continental Line nor The British Brigade's event schedules include events west of the Mississippi River, and only one event is to be held further south than South Carolina.<sup>127</sup> Missy Stolfi of the Second New Jersey Regiment commented on the effects of regionalism and re-enactment, saying, "Our regiment is based out of the Philadelphia area, and people who are in the Philadelphia area are used to seeing eighteenth century stuff...they've seen more of it, they've grown up going to [Revolutionary] places for field trips.... I'd imagine if you go up to Massachusetts, it's going to be a little bit more familiar because everyone knows Boston and the connections [the city has to the Revolution]."<sup>128</sup> Stolfi's co-regimentals mentioned other experiences. "I grew up on the west coast," said Heather Vogeley. "I've heard that there are regiments out there only because I've joined here. So someone will say, 'There are regiments in California.' I never saw it."<sup>129</sup> The highly localized nature of these re-enactment events is a doubled-edged sword; for the public living in those historic regions, re-enactment can be a resource for remembering the Revolution, but for those living elsewhere, it can be a difficult to understand or participate in such experiences. Currently, it does not seem as though the Revolutionary War re-enactment community is looking to expand beyond the eastern seaboard, most likely for reasons of scheduling, participation and financing.

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<sup>127</sup> The southernmost event scheduled is a British Brigade event called "British Nightwatch," and scheduled for December 2010. The British Brigade, Inc. The Continental Line, Inc.

<sup>128</sup> Caron et al.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

The lack of regional participation beyond the states representing the original Thirteen Colonies does not necessarily hurt re-enactment, but it does not necessarily help either.

As John Richard Fino's model dictates, a re-enactment event is a means to an end. As members of the public, re-enactors can only dedicate so much time and energy. While the limitations listed above could be quite crippling to re-enactment, directly addressing such inaccuracies or drawbacks often helps the interpretation rather than harming it. Like any method of instruction, re-enactment is not perfect, but in its attempt to use the Three R's – Revive, Relive, Remember – as much as possible, re-enactment is trying to broach the subject of the American Revolution in a way that is as active, and family friendly as possible.

## **Conclusion**

This project is not suggesting that re-enactment is the only effective way to convey information about the American Revolution, but rather, that it is an example of one way a specific group of people can learn about and commemorate a certain historical moment. This particular method of commemoration may not work for every individual. Different people intake information differently, and while re-enactment may initiate the Three R's response for some, for others it may just be a spectacle to attend on a Saturday afternoon. During the "War and Politics" panel discussion at the Robyn Rafferty Mathias Undergraduate Research Conference, an audience member said, "I could learn about physics riding a rollercoaster, or I could just ride the rollercoaster. It's the same concept."<sup>130</sup> While certainly a valid point for general spectators, re-enactors represent the small sector of the population that *does* learn about physics from riding the rollercoaster. The effectiveness of a re-enactment can heavily depend upon the level of

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<sup>130</sup> Madeline Karp, "Revive, Relive, Remember: Re-enactors and the Memory of the American Revolution (paper presented at the Robyn Rafferty Mathias Undergraduate Research Conference, American University, 20 March 2010).

engagement one has with the event, and the kind of information one gains from attending such re-enactment events can vary greatly. Certainly an audience member could show up, watch a performance and leave without having learned a single thing, but that experience is likely the outlier. Re-enactors want to talk to the public, and bold regimentals and camp followers do approach idle visitors and start talking, despite the fact that they may not have asked a question.

As for the re-enactors, they are often deeply invested in the performance aspects and camp components of a re-enactment because of the amount of time and research they have put in to their impressions. One cannot participate in re-enactments without having done some prior research and fact checking, and there are heavy safety and accuracy regulations by which all re-enactors must abide. The British Brigade Army manual discusses the conditions under which a re-enactor may wield a firearm on the field and in camp and many re-enactors also allude to “organization standards” for accuracy.<sup>131</sup> The research and discussion aspects of re-enactment events are on going projects. Like physics students learning from a rollercoaster ride, the re-enactors research the Revolution and topics germane to their impression, participate in an event, refine their analysis, formulate new research questions based upon their experiences, and then begin the process again. As Adam Young, a re-enactor with the First New Jersey Regiment said, “the greatest thing you can gather is the history around you. You’re not just reading a book; it’s not [two-dimensional]. You can see the [practical] application of [historical] knowledge that people have gathered.”<sup>132</sup> Moreover, re-enactors have the opportunity to apply the knowledge that they themselves have spent time gathering.

The end goal of re-enactment is to illicit educational moments by piquing interest and getting people to ask questions. During an interview at the Hermitage Museum, Sue Deeks spoke

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<sup>131</sup> The British Brigade Army Manual requires that member sign a safety agreement, and that officers certify that all participants have the proper paperwork signed before an event begins.

<sup>132</sup> Funk et al.

of her husband's habit of wearing his uniform outside of the re-enactment. "I remember when we first started [re-enacting], we would have events and after the event was over I would go in and get changed into my everyday clothes and my husband would keep on his colonial clothes because he loved going to local restaurants. This would get people talking, and they'd ask him questions and he saw it as another opportunity to give people a history lesson. After a while I saw it as not so embarrassing."<sup>133</sup> Maintaining an open dialogue about the shared and public history of the American population is key to re-enactment's success. With no one to discuss the implications and meaning of the American Revolution, re-enactment, and the public memory of actual historical events would die out. Re-enactor represent a group of people who are actively working to make sure that the American public never forgets its past, and who are paving the way for alternative means of public historical commemoration and contemplation.

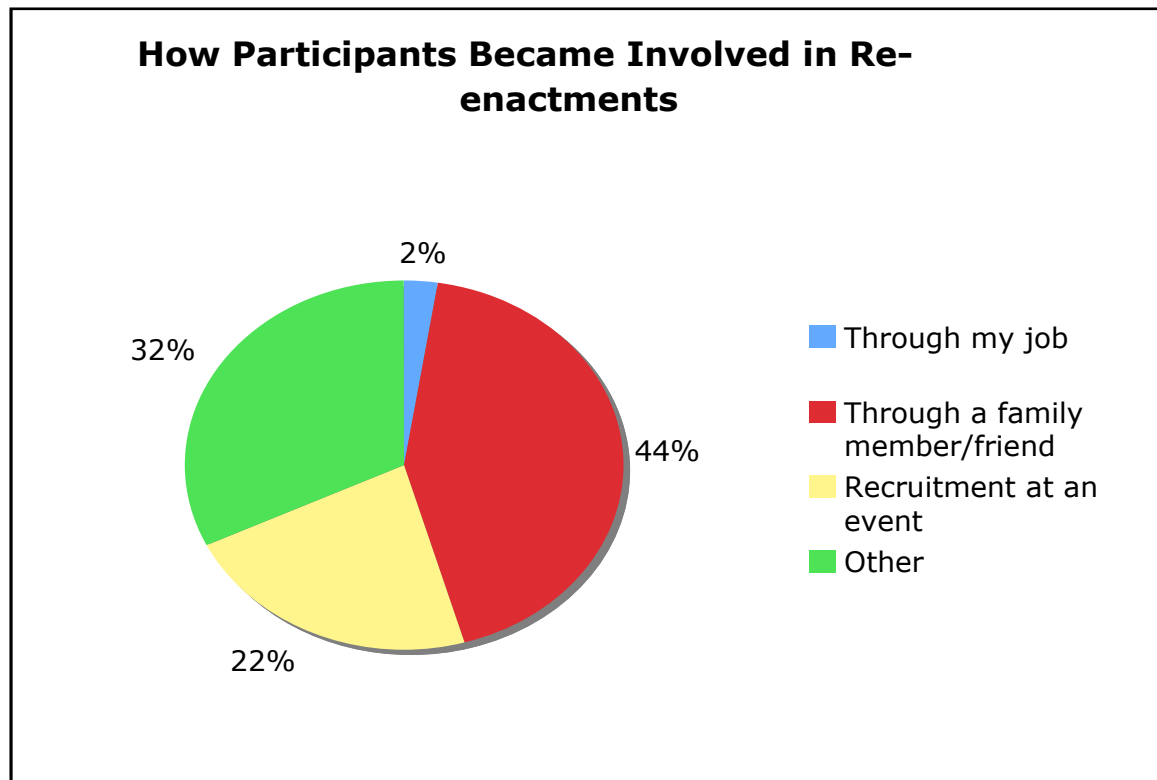
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<sup>133</sup> Deeks.

### **Appendix 1 - Results for “American Revolution Re-enactors Survey”**

The following information is the product of my own research. On November 3, 2009 I posted “American Revolution Re-enactors Survey” or “Survey for a Senior Thesis” on the message board *RevList*, a Yahoo group that boasts approximately 2,000 members. Over a period of four months, approximately 130 individuals completed the survey, representing approximately a 6.5% response rate.

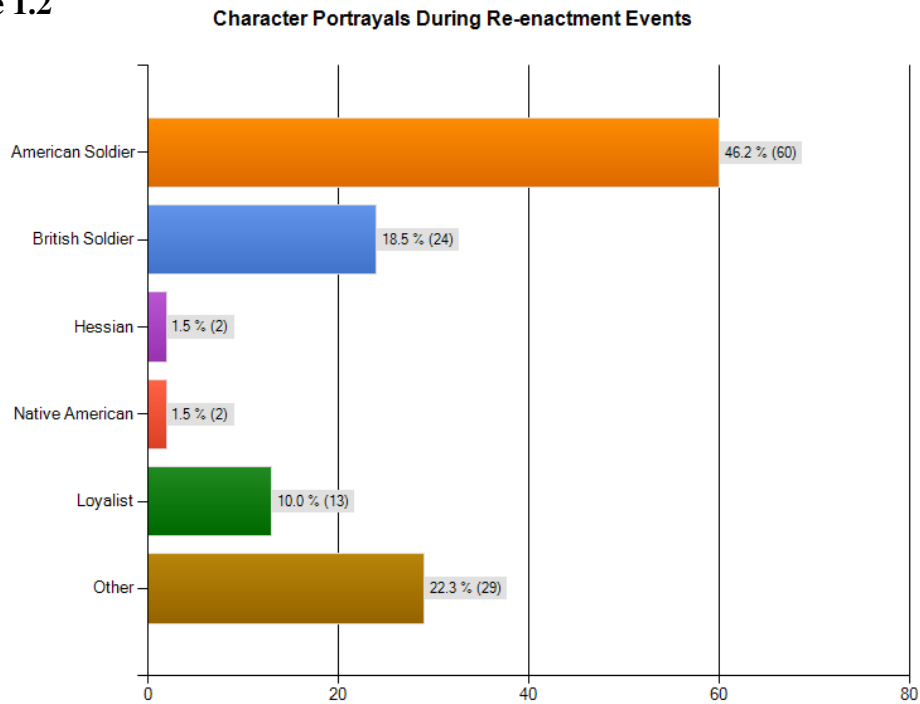
**Figure 1.1**



Most re-enactors reported having been introduced to the hobby by a friend or family member. Responses in the “Other” category included Boy Scouts, a love of history and direct recruitment outside of an event. In one case, a re-enactment community approached an individual because of his talents as an eighteenth century craftsman.

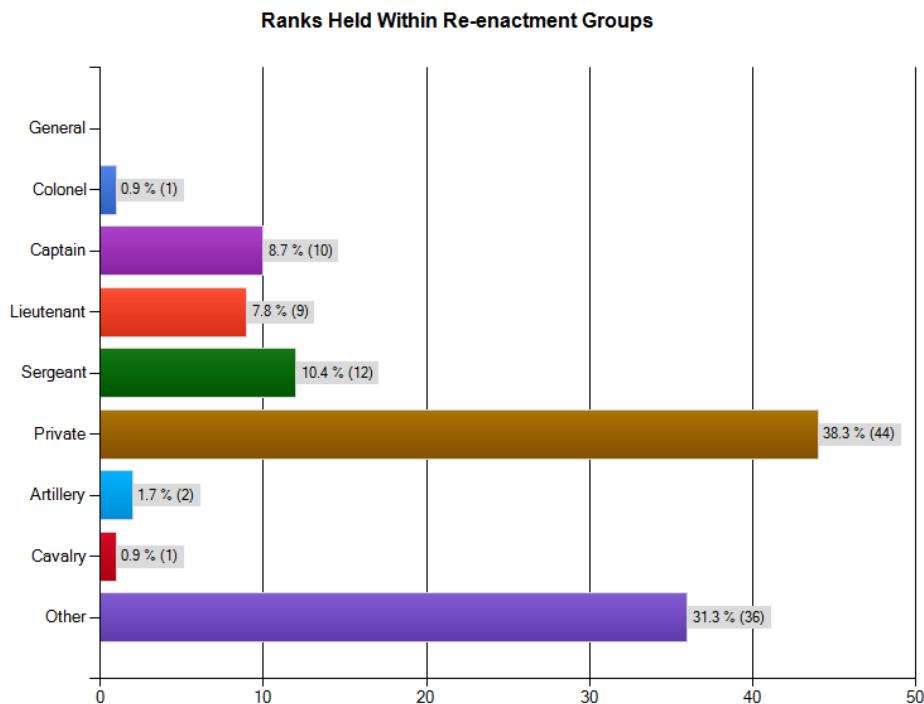


**Figure 1.2**



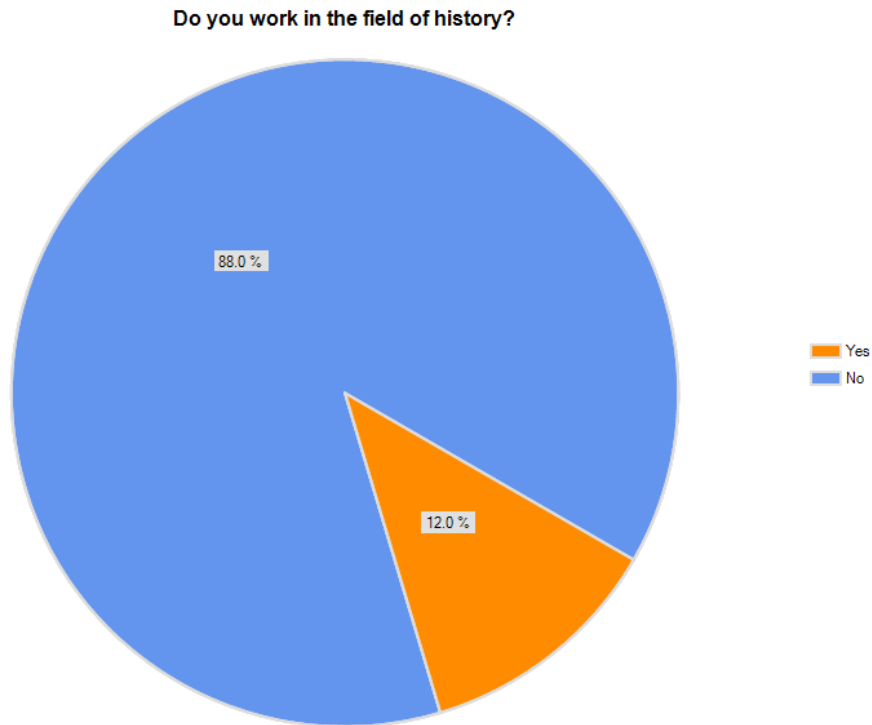
The associated question asked re-enactors to state who they primarily portrayed during re-enactment events. Unsurprisingly, “American Soldier” was the most popular character by a fairly large margin. It is likely that the category “Other” includes re-enactors who would identify themselves as Camp Followers or Civilians.

**Figure 1.3**



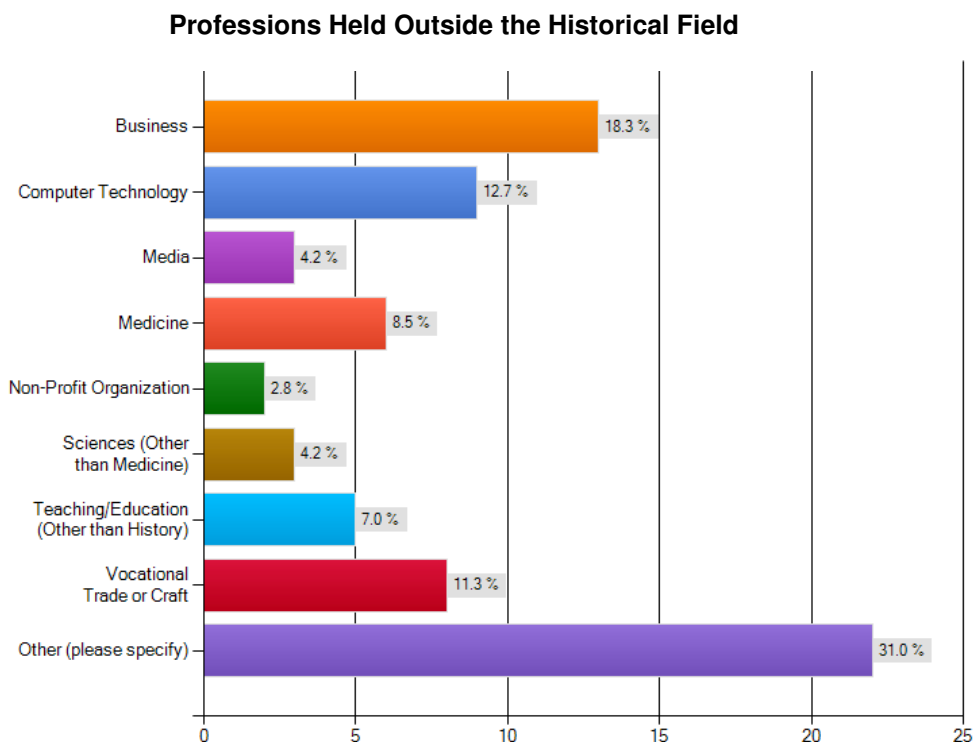
Again, “Other” most likely represents individuals who identify as Camp Followers, Civilians, or other more obscure military ranks.

**Figure 1.4**



Seventy percent of respondents claimed to have a full time profession. Of those professionals, only a few said they worked in the field of history.

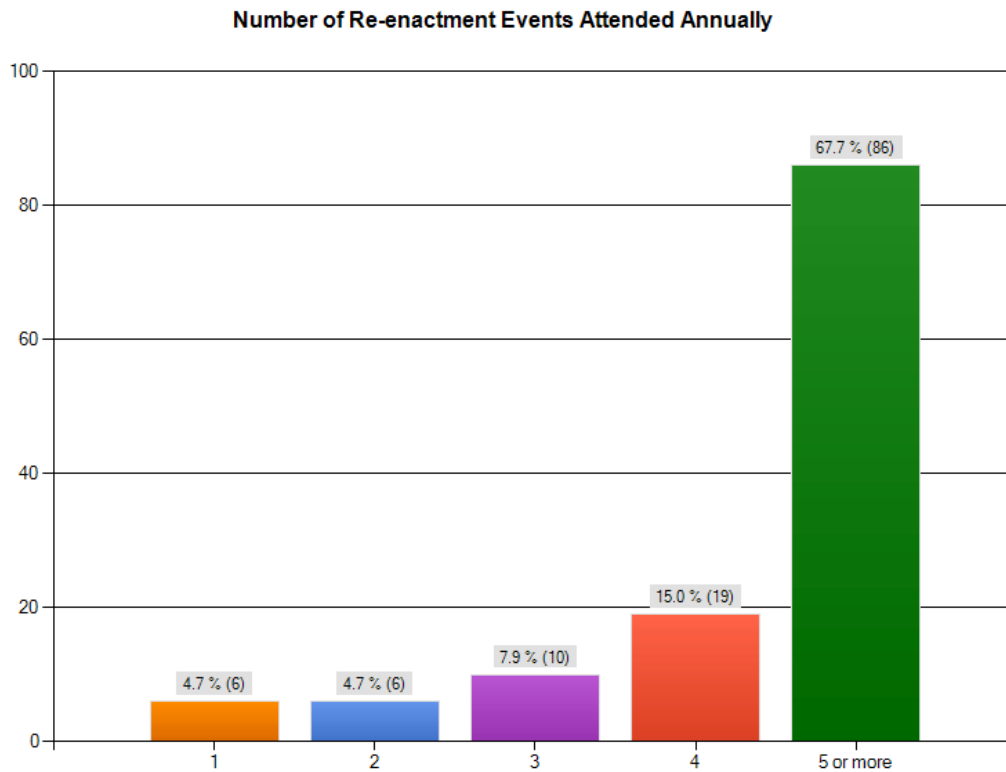
**Figure 1.5**



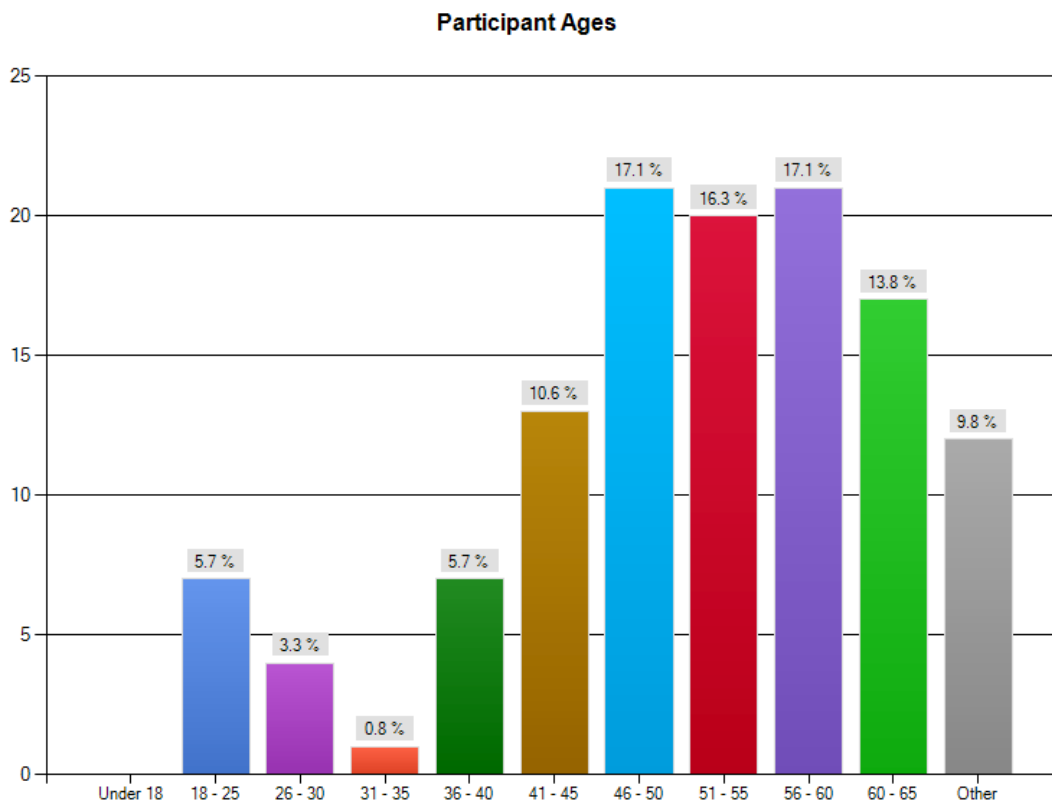
Individuals included in the “Other” category largely specified that they worked in law enforcement or government.

Responses indicate that most re-enactors hold white-collar jobs, and are therefore likely to make enough money to live comfortably, while simultaneously affording the expenses associated with re-enactment.

**Figure 1.6**

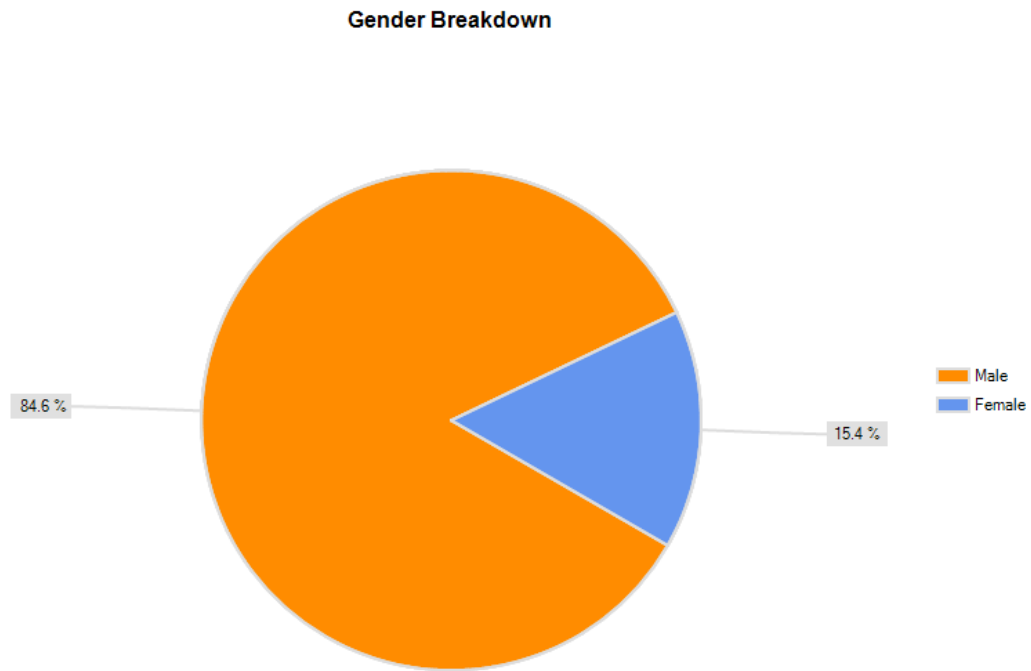


**Figure 1.7**

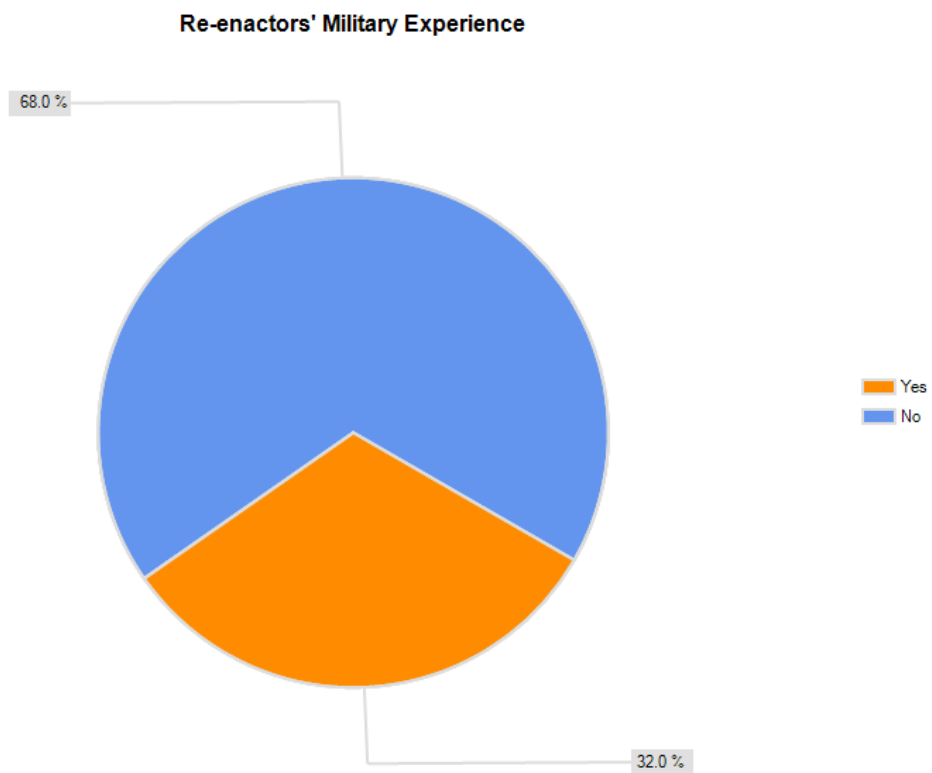


Most re-enactors claimed to be between the ages of 46 and 50 and 56 and 60. This indicates that most re-enactors have reached an age where they can afford the costly expenses associated with Revolutionary War re-enactment.

**Figure 1.8**



**Figure 1.9**



Despite the militaristic trimmings of battle re-enactments, approximately two-thirds of re-enactors do not have military experience.

## **Appendix 2 – Diagrams and Photographs**

**Figure 2.1 – Union and Confederate Veterans Reunite at Gettysburg**



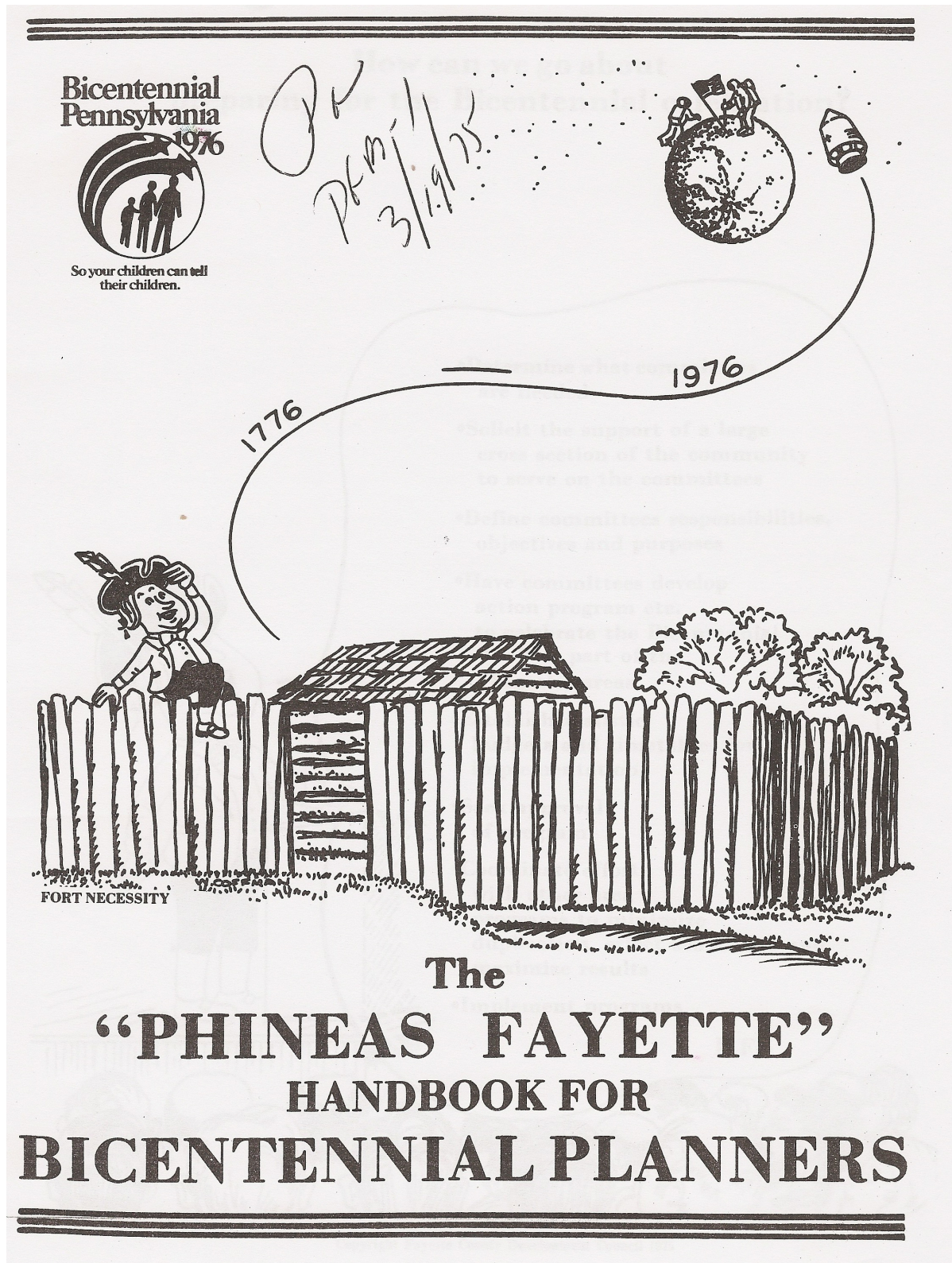
During 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Gettysburg in 1938, Civil War veterans from both the Union and Confederate Armies met to reconcile their differences (pictured above). By this time, many veterans had already died, and many descendants attended in place of their ancestors. By the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Civil War in 1964, all of the veterans were deceased. This event marked the first modern re-enactment.

(Photo Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.)

**Figure 2.2 – Edward Casey’s Four Tiers of Memory**

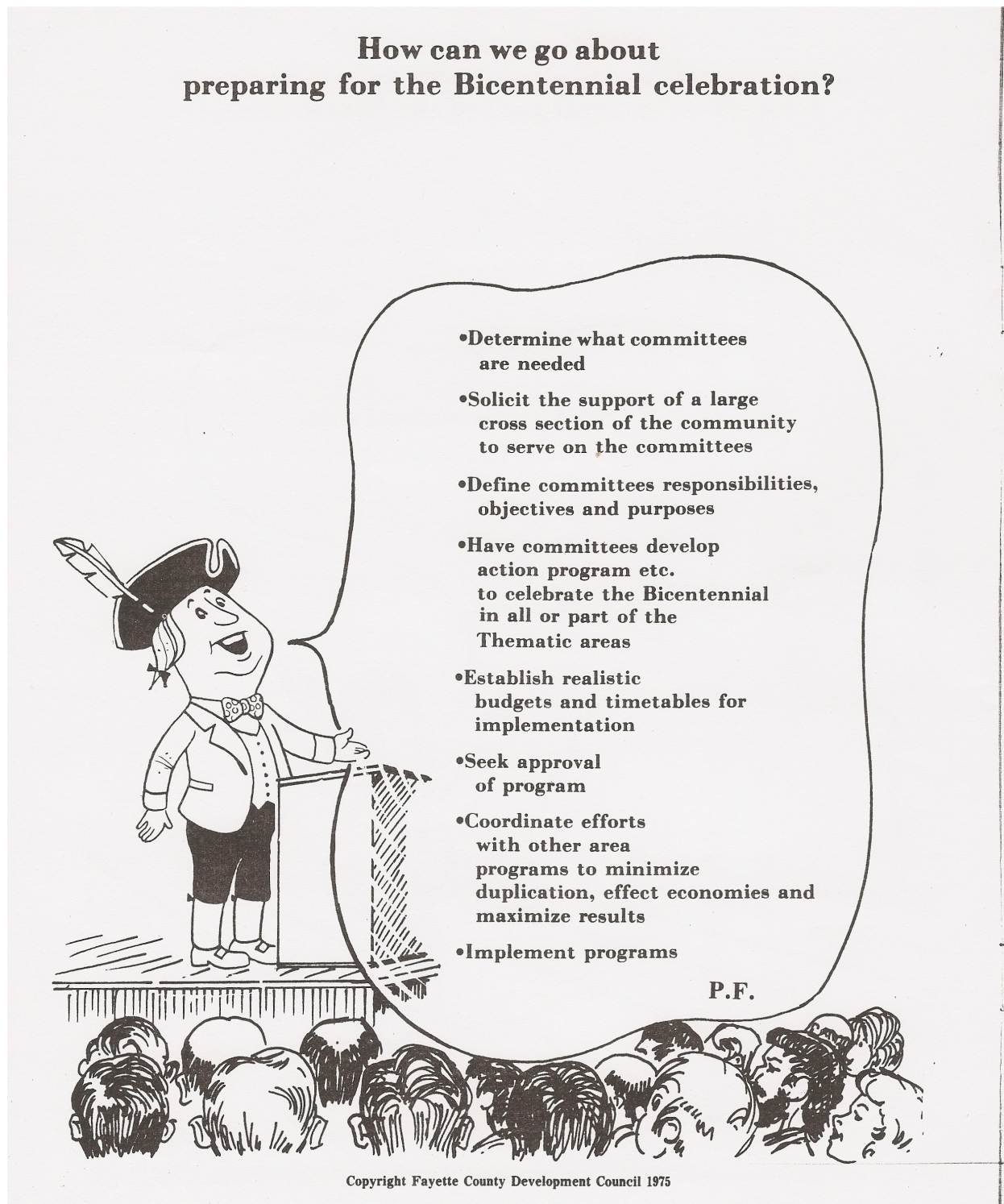
QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

**Figure 2.3 – Front Cover of the Phineas Fayette Handbook for Bicentennial Planners**



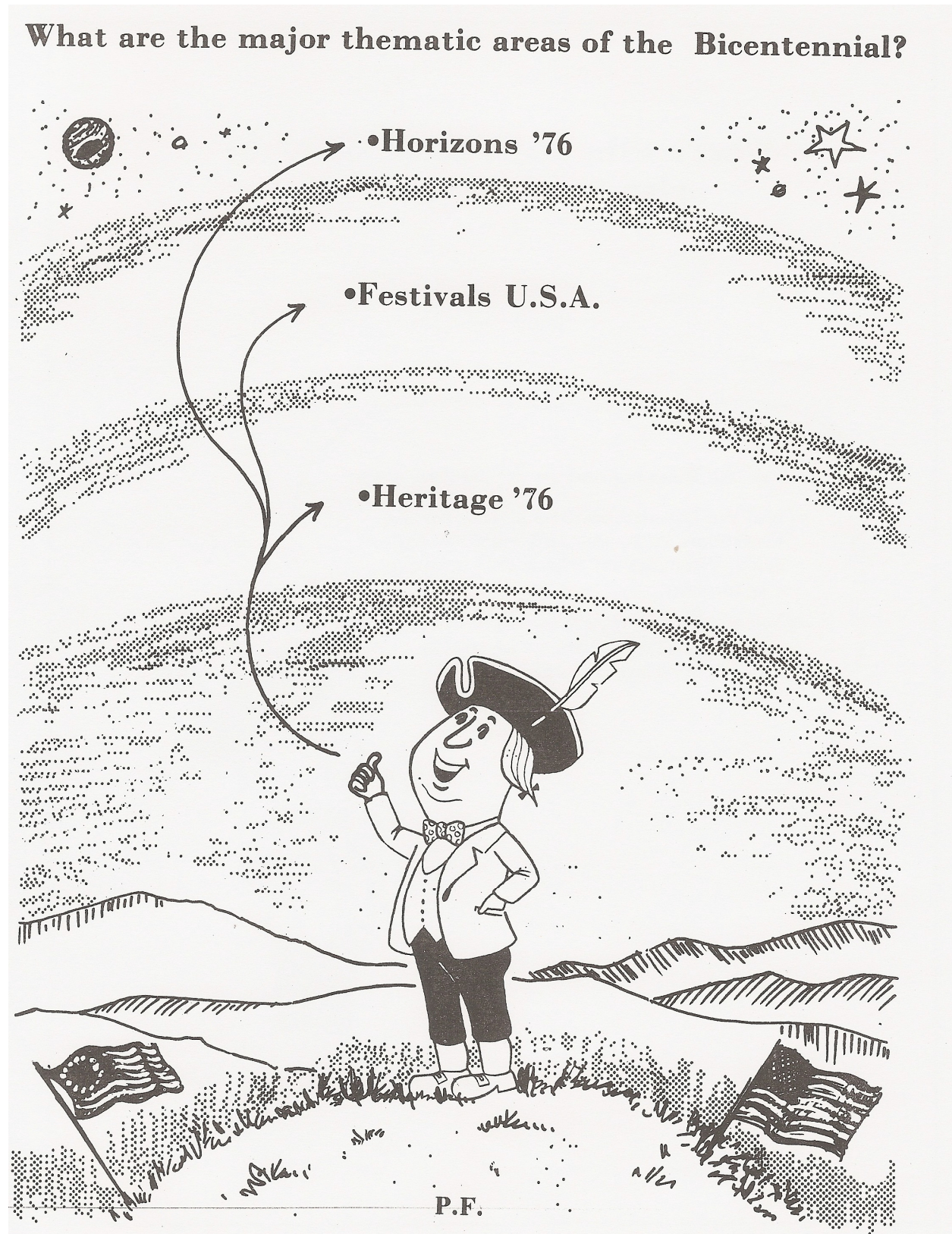


**Figure 2.4 – Page One of the Phineas Fayette Handbook for Bicentennial Planners**





**Figure 2.5 – Page Four of the Phineas Fayette Handbook for Bicentennial Planners**





**Figure 2.6 – Release Forms**



Members of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of the Foot, Light Infantry sign interview release forms after a battle demonstration, October 10, 2009.

**Figure 2.7 – Officers' Meeting**



James “Jim” McGaughey of the British Brigade (front right) leads an Officers' Meeting before a tactical demonstration at Jerusalem Mill. Commanding officers diagram the positions of each regiment as well as plan which side will win, October 10, 2009.

**Figure 2.8– Fire!**



Members of the Second Massachusetts Regiment fire on British forces during a tactical demonstration, October 10, 2009.

**Figure 2.9 – Washington Crossing the Delaware**



John Godzeiba (standing, left) as George Washington during the annual re-enactment of the Delaware Crossing, December 25, 2009.



**Figure 2.10 – Delaware Crossing**



One of three replica boats crosses the Delaware on Christmas Day, December 25, 2009.

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