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Aiming to Reenact: The Efficacy of Military Living History as a Learning Tool

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Aiming to Reenact:
The Efficacy of Military Living History as a Learning Tool

By
Leah Glenn

An Abstract of a Thesis
in
Museum Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
For the Degree of

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Aiming to Reenact:

The Efficacy of Military Living History as a Learning Tool

People around the world have been fascinated with recreating the past since antiquity. Over the past century, however, the presentation of historical information using various forms of human interaction and animation has gained increasing attention, at least in the historic site community if not largely accepted among academic historians. Utilizing a number of non-traditional tools to create a multisensory experience for visitors, this “living” history aims at entertaining the public while providing insights into the past not easily gained through more academic means. Further, there have been many sites, particularly those with a military theme, that have chosen to utilize volunteer “reenactors” to augment their regular programming. Encompassing everything from small military encampments to large-scale mock battles, the subject of reenactment has been both popular and controversial.

This thesis will evaluate to what degree military reenactment is an effective tool in interpreting the history of past events. To do so, one must begin with identifying the major principles of historic interpretation, as they have evolved over the past seven decades, providing important definitions along the way to lay the proper groundwork for the study. Within the larger realm of historic interpretation, a survey of the subtopic of “living history” and its employment at historic sites will provide further context against which to examine the use of reenactment to achieve the goals of both.

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to Historical Interpretation Using Reenactment

Historians often study and research the past with the specific intention to educate people. Traditionally, people learn through various means including lectures, museums, and books. Within the past century, the study of historical events has moved well beyond traditional rote learning in the classroom and exploring the voice of authority in the museum. The information generated by historic researchers can now be interpreted or reinterpreted through an expansion of processes that put a greater emphasis on the visitor experience at an actual historic site. Learning about the past has increasingly come to include more engaging and multi-faceted activities. Such activities are collectively referred to as *historic interpretation* and often include reenactments of historic events. This thesis will explore historic battles and evaluate the validity of reenactment as a tool in the education of visitors.

In his seminal book written in 1957, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, author Freeman Tilden first applied the term interpretation to the process of information sharing that was taking place at National Park Service (NPS) sites. In this context, he defined interpretation as “an educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”¹ According to Tilden, the primary purpose of interpretation is to provoke the visitor’s curiosity while also making their experience enjoyable, so they walk away having learned something. He also stated that “the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation,” which invokes a deeper response to and understanding of the material being

¹ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage: Principles and Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museums, and Historic Places*. (University of North Carolina Press, 1957) 8.

presented.² In the ensuing years, Tilden's work became recognized as the pioneering statement of a set of principles for interpretation in this context. While initially written as a guide for the National Parks Service, of which he was an employee, Tilden's principles and ideas were quickly embraced by both museums and historic sites and have greatly influenced their educational programming.

Historical interpretation translates artifacts or events. It is a process that can take many different forms, invoking an educational experience that often utilizes many different tools. Initially, facts are woven into a cohesive narrative that makes it easier for the audience to understand.³ This allows the audience to relate to the material and take something away from what they have learned. There are many traditional forms of interpretation that museums and historic sites may choose to spark their visitors' sense of curiosity.⁴ For example, museum exhibits typically display artifacts accompanied by labels that provide information. Similarly, interpretive signage or plaques can be utilized outdoors, where the historic narrative is outside of a museum's brick-and-mortar building. Historic walking or bus tours are another example of interpretation that provides visitors with a sense of what may have taken place at a specific site. While these more traditional forms of historical interpretation are valuable when the artifacts are behind glass or barriers, they limit the visitors' ability to truly connect with the object.

Staff or volunteers known as historic interpreters are often used to further the educational goals of a historic site. Historic interpreters' main goal is to answer the question: "How can we interpret why this particular event or object should be important to the viewer?" They hope to

² Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 9.

³ Mark Woolmer, "You're a what? Interpreting Interpretation to Non-interpreters," *Museums + Heritage Advisor*, July 31, 2017, Accessed on June 13, 2020, <https://advisor.museumsandheritage.com/blogs/youre-interpreting-interpretation-non-interpreters/>.

⁴ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 9.

invoke curiosity while, at the same time, providing visitors with properly researched information about the significance of a historic site or artifact.⁵ An excellent example of successful historic interpretation can be found at the NPS, where they explained through an educational lens why slavery is an important topic discussed at Civil War historic sites in the United States. Originally, the NPS did not explain the causes of the Civil War to visitors, only the battle tactics of the armies. Previously left out of the narrative, it was not until 1995 that that the topic of slavery was included in their exhibits. With help from Civil War scholars who provided primary documents for research, the NPS was able to present visitors with correct and well-rounded information. This was a nationwide effort at all of the Civil War sites that fall under the NPS. The visitors were concerned that the historic interpreters would eliminate all of the military history and replace it with political correctness. However, the opposite occurred, giving the visitors a factual and comprehensive view of why the Civil War happened.⁶

In the past seventy years, the profession of historic interpretation has allowed historic sites to create regulations and guidelines in the field of interpretation based on fact and safety. With guidelines set in place, historic interpreters can develop programming that gives the visitors a new and thought-provoking experience. Many of these programs include living history and sometimes the subculture of reenactment.

⁵ Sam H. Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose*, (Fulcrum Publishing, 2016).

⁶ Dwight T. Pitcaithley, "Public Education and the National Park Service: Interpreting the Civil War," *Perspectives on History*, November 1, 2007, Accessed on June 24, 2020, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/november-2007/public-education-and-the-national-park-service-interpreting-the-civil-war>.

Living History

This thesis defines *living history* as an immersive experience that historic sites use to engage the five senses and transport the visitor to the period being portrayed. For example, many historic interpreters wear period dress to portray their assigned daily role. Additionally, they give live presentations, such as weapon demonstrations, bread baking, or blacksmithing. This type of multi-sensory experience creates a balance between entertainment and education for visitors. There is ample research and guidance that goes into this type of interpretation to convey accurate information. The importance of traditional research, including primary documents and peer-reviewed works on the subject, is crucial for the historic site to have a successful interpretive effort.

Living history allows for human interaction at a site, whether it is the original site or reconstructed, giving visitors an immersive experience of how the site could have looked, sounded, smelled, etc. in the past.⁷ This differs from other types of historical interpretation, such as a guided tour where a staff member or volunteer leads a group of visitors around a historic site.

For the visitor to have an informative and enjoyable experience, the historic interpreters need to make the information accessible, understandable, and be able to connect the visitors to the historic site. One way historic interpreters are able to do this is with the incorporation of material culture. *Material culture* are original artifacts from people such as written records, tools, weapons, clothing, and art. It is used in addition to relevant research to provide accurate facts

⁷American Association for State and Local History, *The Outdoor Living History Museum: Interpretation Research Project*, March 2009, Accessed on May 13, 2020, <http://download.aaslh.org/AASLH-Website-Resources/The+Outdoor+Living+History+Museum.pdf>.

for the visitors.⁸ For example, visitors can see a musket up close, learn how to load it, hear how loud it is when it is fired, and smell the gun powder. This experience is not attainable with a musket in a traditional exhibit case shielded by glass. It is important to note that many historic interpreters use reproductions when interacting with visitors. Using reproductions is for the safety of everybody involved and to preserve original artifacts from everyday wear and tear.

Military Reenactment

When attempting to engage visitors on the subjects of military history and warfare, historic sites will sometimes employ a specific subgenre of historic interpretation known as *reenactment*. It can be a tangible experience that supplements learning.⁹ While, in theory, this term can be applied to almost any historical activity, in this context it is almost always used to describe military demonstrations. Reenactment at historic sites typically involves third-person interpretation where people in historic costumes perform a demonstration for the visitors about the past from a modern-day perspective.

Reenactments can include military encampments, weapons demonstrations, static displays and even choreographed battles, all aimed at conveying information about certain facets of military technology and practice during a specific, or even multiple, time periods. They allow for a multi-sensory experience for visitors to witness the way battles would have looked, smelled, and sounded. While historic sites typically embrace a certain level of entertainment to keep visitors coming back to these large-scale reenactments, it should be noted that multiple

⁸ Chris Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Mike Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer, eds. *Handbook of Material Culture*. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2006) 3.

⁹ Stacy F. Roth, *Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First person Historical Interpretation*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 9.

factors go into making a successful and educational experience that these sites need to consider. One of the main goals of reenactments “should not only make the visitor witness an activity from the past but also to encourage that visitor to consider the larger sociological conditions of which the activity is a part.”¹⁰

The use of firearms is one of the many ways that sets military reenactment apart from other types of interpretation. Involving weapons in reenactments adds a dangerous layer to this specific type of interpretation, therefore certain safeguards should be considered. The type of weapons used depends on the historical era that is being featured in the public programming. Some examples are swords, catapults, and of course, various types of projectile weapons. They are typically put on display and often demonstrated for the visitors to get a sense of how they functioned and were used in battle. The use of projectile weapons is of a particular concern. An additional safety factor to consider is that many families attend reenactments. The event administration staff need to have an organized, strategic plan and proper barriers to keep everybody safe since small children running around boundaries can pose a risk to the reenactors.

Another aspect that needs to be considered are the 21st century gun laws. These affect the logistics of any reenactment that involves projectile weapons. The organizers need to be aware of these laws since they affect what displays, demonstrations and battles can be portrayed. Having such a worldwide network of reenactors descending on a historic site causes a unique challenge when they need to bring their historic weapons across state lines or international borders. In the United States, each state or county has different gun laws. This can result in reenactors

¹⁰ Megan Shelley Mateer,. "Living History as Performance: An Analysis of the Manner in which Historical Narrative is Developed through Performance," (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 2006) 38.

scrambling to reconcile or adapt to inconsistencies in safety protocols and regulations encountered at different historic sites in various locations.¹¹

Reenactors have various motivations for recreating the past that is either expressed through public programming or privately held events. Some reenactors have a love of history that drives them to pursue this activity and learn as much as possible. Other reenactors may be a veteran, their family is or was involved in the military or they are a museum professional that has the desire to teach people about historic warfare. For example, nostalgia is possibly one of the most significant reasons for people who reenact as Confederate soldiers. Author Christopher Bates gives a probable explanation as to why so many people are drawn to be Confederate reenactors. He explains that many people have an idealized version of Southern culture during the 19th century, and for many Southerners this testament remains true. This idea is described as the "Lost Cause," as Bates states that reenacting is "not as a product of modern-day racism but in the context of the Southern "Lost Cause" interpretation of the Civil War—a blend of romance and politics that still has enormous resonance today."¹² Many Confederate reenactors look at the war as if it is in a bubble only wanting to reenact what happened during the years of the Civil War, specifically between 1861-1865. A 35-year-old Confederate reenactor states, "We portray Confederates because they were the underdogs and they had all the odds stacked against them...The politics that caused the war, we don't even care about."¹³ The motive behind people reenacting is a complicated issue to unpack and may also include that reenactors want more than

¹¹ "Gun Laws By State," The Complete Guide, Guns to Carry. Accessed on April 1, 2020. <https://www.gunstocarry.com/gun-laws-state/>.

¹² 11. Christopher Bates, "Oh, I'm a Good Ol' Rebel": Reenactment, Racism, and the Lost Cause." in *The Civil War in Popular Culture: Meaning and Memory*, ed. Randal Allred and Lawrence A. Kreiser (University Press of Kentucky, 2014) 195.

¹³ Bryn Stole, "The Decline of the Civil War Re-enactor," The New York Times, July 28, 2018. Accessed on March 27, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/28/style/civil-war-reenactments.html>.

just the visitor experience; they want to truly live out the history they are presenting.¹⁴

Reenacting allows these people to step back in time, connect, and be part of the recreated history more than what the visitors get to see and do.

There are some potential drawbacks that can impact the historic authenticity of any living history or reenactment program. These can include age, weight, gender, and race. Visual accuracy is important in any recreated portrayal of peoples past, but modern issues of inclusion can run counter to such accuracy issues. Many reenactors are retired men and women that reenact as a hobby; however, their older age is often inaccurate when it comes to their chosen historical era. Some reenactment units are strict about their unit's appearance in public events. One reenactor said that: "We can be flexible on age if the man is in good physical shape, but we cannot be flexible on weight. (You can't tell a man is forty-five years old from one hundred feet away, but you can tell he is thirty pounds overweight from five hundred feet)."¹⁵

The race of reenactors is also a challenge in some circumstances. Is someone of a different race able to represent another? A significant percentage of the reenactment community is Caucasian and many public and private events, especially in the United States and Europe, depict wars and battles that were made up of Caucasian militaries. Many reenactors feel that reenactments have become "whitewashed."¹⁶ Various ethnicities feel they are not welcome to participate in reenactments because they feel forced to be part of a reenactment group that is only

¹⁴ Megan Shelley Mateer, "Living History as Performance: An Analysis of the Manner in which Historical Narrative is Developed through Performance," (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 2006).

¹⁵Jenny Thompson, *War Games: Inside the World of 20th Century War Reenactments*, (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004) 218.

¹⁶ Wilson Freeman, "Ask a Reenactor: Ethnicity & Reenacting," *Historically Speaking*, June 22, 2012. Accessed on April 2, 2020. <https://historicallyspeaking.driftingfocus.com/2012/06/22/ask-a-reenactor-ethnicity-reenacting/>.

their ethnicity. However, Caucasian people reenact as Japanese, Korean, or other ethnicities because reenactments require an enemy. This double standard is a significant challenge within the reenactment community.

Women who want to reenact as soldiers face a similar problem. Can females portray males in historic reenactments? Typically, women do not reenact the role of the soldier since some reenactors find the concept offensive or historically inaccurate. Nevertheless, reenactments are a recreation of history and not a perfect account of what happened in history.¹⁷ Many historical societies and historic sites do not discriminate if the reenactors follow all the guidelines and put on a good representation. People attending reenactments need to know that what they are witnessing is not what happened in history but is the best way that these reenactors who have an appreciation for history can provide the visitors entertainment and knowledge about past wars. These are all considerations that need to be taken into account when historic sites use the reenactors as educational tools.

When historic sites invite reenacting groups to participate in their programming, some information may be lost in translation from the original source. This results in the need for ample oversight from the administration to make sure the historic site's interpretive narrative and goals are being met. The use of volunteer reenactors, who have not been trained by the historic site, is potentially a further removal from the correct research that historic sites typically provide. This is a calculated risk that historic sites need to consider for the visitors to get as much of an educational experience as possible and understand why military units were stationed at the historic site. The historic site or organization needs to have the proper execution and application

¹⁷ Jenny Thompson, *War Games: Inside the World of 20th Century War Reenactments*, (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004) 219-221.

for reenactments to make it an effective tool of interpretation. If the historic site does not have the appropriate means or context, such as a sufficient budget or enough room for reenactors and visitors, to host a military reenactment, then the educational value will diminish. Compared to a static, unchanging museum label, the introduction of the human element also introduces a level of inconsistency in the delivery of the "message." This inconsistency can also, and inadvertently, generate incorrect information, or possibly, situations where historic interpreters include information of their own that has not been fully confirmed by research.

Living history incorporates the method of reenactment to present another form of interpretation to visitors of a historic site. Professor Jay Anderson suggests that "living history serves three purposes: as a way that museums can teach about the past, as a research tool, and as a hobby."¹⁸ These three points can also be applied to a historic reenactment where many museums invite reenactment groups to participate in their programming and to bring their own skillset to help interact with the visitors. Appropriately executed reenactments, with the correct information, safety measures and room, can help educate the visitors and provoke their sense of interest towards the past, thus making historic reenactments a potentially effective way to present history.

¹⁸ Stacy F. Roth, *Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First person Historical Interpretation*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 12.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

There have been numerous works that analyze the effective uses of interpretation at different types of historic sites and museums. Some of the key ideas overlap across the topic of interpretation since they are similar in their educational goals. This chapter will examine the literature pertaining to the field of historic interpretation and the subfields of living history interpretation and reenactment to provide an historiographic context to the proposed thesis.

Principles of Interpretation

Freeman Tilden was the pioneer in expanding the concept of interpretation and explaining the many degrees in which it can be used. Although the idea and use of interpretation were already being employed in museums and historic sites, Tilden was the first to establish a set of principles for interpretation. Much of the literature in the historic interpretation field stems from Tilden's initial efforts and the six main principles that he developed, which are illustrated in his book *Interpreting Our Heritage*.

Tilden's first principle states that the presented interpretation needs to resonate and be accessible to the visitors, otherwise, the experience may be "sterile."¹⁹ The second principle explains how transferring facts to the visitors without any context or narrative is not the goal of interpretation. He states that "interpretation is revelation based upon information."²⁰ His third principle explains how interpretation is an art form that can explain various subjects such as science, history, or architecture, claiming that "any art is in some way teachable."²¹ Tilden's

¹⁹ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage: Principles and Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museums, and Historic Places*. (University of North Carolina Press, 1957) 9.

²⁰ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 9.

²¹ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 9.

fourth principle explains that, “the chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.”²² While instruction does help visitors learn, it is crucial at historic sites to get the visitors interested in the subject that is being presented in ways that will spark their curiosity. His fifth principle makes sure that historic sites give the whole narrative about what they are presenting and not just a small part. Finally, the sixth principle that Tilden presents is that the interpretation presented to adults should not be simplified for children, but instead should be approached in a “fundamentally different” way in order for the children to learn the most that they can.²³ Tilden’s book has had a tremendous impact on the museum community; museum professionals have used his ideologies as they apply to their site, whether it be a house museum or an open-air museum.

The next three books embrace Tilden’s ideologies and cover how the many different forms of interpretation can look at various types of museums. Many overlapping themes help create a successful interpretive plan that can enhance the learning experience and spark curiosity.

In Sam H. Ham’s book, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose*, he examines Tilden’s principles and how they fit into different types of historic sites and museums. One of the overarching themes is that “connection making is the single most important outcome of interpretation.”²⁴ Ham explains that if connections are not being made with the visitors, their experience will have lacked its full potential.

William T. Alderson and Shirley Low explain the importance of interpretation, specifically at historic sites. Their book, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, provides a well-rounded outline of what should be included and is expected in the interpretive plan of a historic site.

²² Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 9.

²³ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 9.

²⁴ Sam H. Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose*, (Fulcrum publishing, 2016).

Building from Tilden's ideologies, they thoroughly explain the historic site's objectives, providing additional methods of interpretation, such as well-designed guidebooks, brochures, and visually appealing yet traditional exhibits, and how to train the interpreters properly. In their evaluation of whether a historic site has demonstrated if their interpretive plan was beneficial, they state: "The measure of successful interpretation is the degree to which we have created understanding in the mind and heart of the visitor, the degree to which we somehow have communicated to him the understanding we wish him to have of our site."²⁵

Jessica Foy Donnelly's book *Interpreting Historic House Museums* is a compilation of various essays written about historic houses' interpretive goals. These goals can vary from house to house as the authors explain the differences in funding, interest level, and location of historic houses. In the 1940s, the federal government continued to carry on the preservation and education that was started during the Great Depression, resulting in an abundance of the historic houses that are open today and their increased interpretive efforts.²⁶

As seen in many of these historic site and museums across the United States, the ideas of gender roles and people of color are often discussed in association with the time period that the building was a home. Throughout these essays, Tilden's principles are laced with analysis about making historic house museums more accessible to visitors with a visual and well researched interpretive plan, making the learning engaging and not ignoring the fact that history can slightly change the narrative at historic houses. This can happen with the discovery of historical documents or modern-day technology, such as identifying who is buried in the family's graveyards or digitally reconstructing historic houses.

²⁵ William Thomas Alderson and Shirley Payne Low, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, (Rowman Altamira, 1996) 159.

²⁶ Jessica Foy Donnelly, ed. *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, (Rowman Altamira, 2002) 29.

Many literature sources explain that in the early 20th century, academic professionals looked down upon historic sites and their version of interpretation because they viewed the work of historic sites as amateur and lacking in academic research. Throughout the century, as historic sites became more education-based with sufficient and accurate research being done, the academic world came to realize that historic sites can be a great learning tool if they are presented correctly. For example, Conner Prairie, a living history museum located near Indianapolis, IN, recreates the lifestyle of the early 19th century. In the 1980s, their interpretive plan had a much-needed overhaul to present their content more accurately. In John Patterson's article, "Conner Prairie Refocuses Its Interpretive Message to Include Controversial Subjects," he explains that academic professionals did not think the interpretive staff would be able to accurately describe what the settlement was like with their limited resources. Patterson explains, "all of us in the history profession want to show life as it was, but none of us desire to insult or irritate the public in the process."²⁷ Conner Prairie figured out how to run educational programs without disgracing the public and academic professionals began to realize how valuable this type of education is and appreciate the importance of how material culture analysis can help with programming.

Similar to Patterson's ideas, Barry Mackintosh discusses how historians, seemingly, look down upon the use of living history museums as truth. However, the interpretive staff at historic sites, specifically the staff at the NPS with the accumulation of military battlefields, can be excellent teaching tools that can create memories and be a useful learning device. Mackintosh states that "an historical site is source material for the study of history, just as any written

²⁷ John Patterson, "Conner Prairie refocuses its interpretive message to include controversial subjects." (*History News* 41, no. 2, 1986) 14.

record.”²⁸ Ronald J. Grele also addresses this problem in his article “Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of the Public Historian?” He explains how academia needs to recognize that the interpretive plans at historic sites are a legitimate learning tool, and that history professionals should nurture local history as it is an interest to people, and not to belittle the different types of learning opportunities.

Nina Simon uses Tilden’s outline for interpretation but takes it one step further by explaining how museums can benefit from interpreters with the participation from the visitors. In her book, *The Participatory Museum*, she explains how hands-on learning can be a more effective learning tool than reading labels behind glass. Her three underlying messages in the book are “audience centered institutions, visitors construct their own meanings, and users can inform and invigorate,” which is a modern way of interpreting Tilden’s principles, given the way visitor interaction has changed.²⁹ Simon provides abundant lists of websites and cell phone apps for visitors to engage in the museums content even more, such as “I Like Museums” trails. This website provides users with a curated selection of museums in England when they select what their interests are, some of the categories are “Acting Like a Kid,” “Sparkly Things” or “Dressing Up.”³⁰ Her way of combining history with technology provides a new and exciting way for younger generations to get involved with museum programming. Simon’s book helps provide the framework for what successful interpretive plans can look like at a variety of museums and can easily be adapted for historic sites.

²⁸ Barry Mackintosh, "The national park service moves into historical interpretation." (*The Public Historian* 9, no. 2, 1987) 55.

²⁹ Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, (Museum 2.0, 2010) ii.

³⁰ I Like Museums, “Museum Search,” Accessed on April 18, 2021, <https://ilikemuseums.com/museums/search/>.

Living History Literature

Living history is an extension of interpretation that puts a face to the history that is being presented. There are many books and articles that explain the fundamentals of providing an accurate and educational living history experience at museums and historic sites. Much of the research dives into how to carry out the correct measures needed to achieve this goal and make sure that the proper amount of research is done. Included in these books and articles are real-world applications of how interpretation is applied to living history programs and explains the advantages and shortcomings of this type of learning.

In Allison's book, *Living History: Effective Costumed Interpretation and Enactment at Museums and Historic Sites*, he argues that when visitors visit a living history museum and have a face-to-face interaction with an interpreter that is costumed as a person from the past that "they are able to make a more meaningful and rich connection to history than almost any other technique."³¹ He also elaborates on the themes of holding museums accountable to their word for changing and adapting to their audience's needs and to joining together the two sometimes divergent aspects of learning and fun to create a memorable experience.

Jay Anderson's book, *Time Machines: The World of Living History*, is a major study about living history in general that was published in 1984. Anderson ties in his personal experiences of working in museums to the three distinct categories of living history; living history for research purposes, as an educational tool, and for a source of recreation.³² Much like the lasting influence of Tilden's book, Anderson's book is the starting point for understanding and explaining the fundamentals of living history.

³¹ David B. Allison, *Living History: Effective Costumed Interpretation and Enactment at Museums and Historic Sites*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016) vii.

³² Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History*, (Nashville: American Association for State & Local History, 1984).

Scott Magelssen approaches the discussion of living history from a different perspective. He does not place the different types of living history into different categories; rather, he “articulates the relationships between beliefs and practices within institutional museum sites that use costumed interpretation as a historiographic practice.”³³ He also departs from Anderson’s models of the linear evolution seen in museum displays and categorizes living history as a whole as a unique type of performance. He concludes that living history is, in essence, its own type of theatre performance in that it gives the visitors a better idea into what they are learning about at a historic site as they get to interact with the people performing.

Alternative pieces of research about living history can be found on the website Sustaining Places, an “encyclopedia of resources for small historical organizations.”³⁴ There are many short video clips and digital essays that provide insight for programming and ways to do effective interpretation at historic sites. First-person versus third-person interpretations are explained in the video TEDx talk titled “Being Betsy: Why Living History Matters,” where Carol Spacht, a Betsy Ross interpreter, explains how first-person interpretation is a learning and experiential tool for the visitors to connect with. Ideas from this are borrowed from Stacy F. Roth’s book titled *Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First Person Historical Interpretation*, which lays out the foundation for making a useful and meaningful first-person interpretation. The National Trust for Historic Preservation created a useful list titled “Instant Living History: 10 Tips for Costumed Interpretation at Historic Sites” that provides information for newcomers or established organizations looking for ways to improve their living history interpretation. This source is easy to access and provides abundant research and tips for the living history field.

³³ Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums, Undoing History Through Performance*, (Scarecrow Press, 2007) xv.

³⁴ Museum Studies at the University of Delaware, “Sustaining Places; Living History Programming,” Accessed on July 15, 2020. <https://sustainingplaces.com/interpretation/>.

Colonial Williamsburg has contributed a significant amount of literature about the living history experience to the genre. Various subjects are discussed about the practices of the living history programs that have been at the site, such as holding a recreated slave auction in the 1990s. These pieces of literature look at both the history of Colonial Williamsburg and the ways that their interpretive programming can be more successful in the future. Some of these texts include Anders Greenspan's book, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg*, that explains the institutional and policy changes that took place over the time the site has been open to visitors; Stephen Eddy Snow's book, *Performing the Pilgrims*, that argues the question of whether living history can be considered theatre; and Richard Handler and Eric Gable's book, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*, that explains the shift Colonial Williamsburg took from traditional museum features to a more well-rounded social history aspect.

Military Reenactment Literature

There is a vast variety of literature written about military reenactments. Many sources attempt to explain why reenactments happen and what the motivations are behind some of the reenactors. Tilden's interpretive structure is seen interwoven through the books and articles written about the subject. Tilden's principles also influence historic sites' decisions to see if reenactment will help further their message and goals of a site to educate the public. Many authors conclude that the feeling of a "period rush," the feeling a reenactor gets as if they truly are in the time period they are portraying, drives the most enthusiastic people to reenact. The literature covers the varying perspectives about authenticity and the differing ideas of who should be explaining the history, the creditable academic institutions, or reenactors.

The article “What is Reenactment?” by Vanessa Agnew addresses some of the challenges that reenactment faces. She explains how at first the museum professionals did not consider reenactment a true form of living history, as it was believed it could not portray history correctly. After some evolutions within the field of history, such as working with museums and other living history programs, Agnew argues that reenactments used as teachable sources can be achievable. Agnew concludes that reenactments have “broad appeal, its [reenactments] implicit charge to democratize historical knowledge, and its capacity to find new and inventive modes of historical representation suggest that it also has a contribution to make to academic historiography.”³⁵ She explains there is potential in the reenacting field to improve museum professional’s perspective on interpretation to make it a more acceptable way to portray history.

Jenny Thompson provides a different perspective in the reenactment field. Her book, *War Games*, is an ethnographic look into the world of reenacting, and most notably, the various reasons why people reenact. Thompson conducted interviews with hundreds of reenactors across the United States, collected survey results, and even took part in some reenactments herself. Her research covers multiple topics in the world of reenacting, such as the authenticity of weapons, uniforms and battle movements, the morals and ethics behind the events, and the differing view on reenacting from the people who participate to the general public. Thompson’s goal was to get the reader to understand what these people do and not to conceal what happens at reenactments. She states: “I wanted to represent them as I found them: complicated, contradictory, and human.”³⁶ Her writing style offers a real-world look into the reenactment community that contrasts many of the other scholarly sources written about living history subculture.

³⁵ Vanessa Agnew, “Introduction: What Is Reenactment?,” (*Criticism*, Vol. 46: Iss. 3, Article 2, 2004) 335.

³⁶ Jenny Thompson, *War Games: Inside the World of 20th Century War Reenactments*. (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004) 275.

There are numerous periods of history that are reenacted throughout the world, yet the enthusiasm towards the United States Civil War surpasses other war reenactments, both in literature and reenactments themselves. The history of the Civil War is a popular topic in literature, which may explain why there are so many Civil War reenactors and theories explaining their motives, many of which center around nostalgia.

Ethnographer Lain Hart gives his perspective on how people are trying to represent the past authentically and how successful the reenactors are in his article about Civil War reenacting, “Authentic Recreation: Living History and Leisure.” Hart explains how the issues of authenticity and subjectivity become the main challenges of reenactors who want to recreate a war that still has implications that affect the United States today. He says that some people view reenactments as a distortion of history, while others view them as a hyperreality to fully explain and immerse oneself into the past.³⁷ He goes into further detail about the different elements he witnessed when he attended a reenactment in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in 2006. At this reenactment, he saw the various roles women played, the large part that religion played, and the different sections of the camp. In his research and firsthand accounts from reenactors, he noticed many rifts within the reenactment community and how these create challenges that the reenactors and the historical sites must overcome. Hart also makes some of the same conclusions as Agnew, as he states there is a disconnect between the reenacting world and the academic world. Some reenactors become defensive when people ask how they know their history, while others go into detail about research and consulting with academically trained historians.

In his article, “Playing Rebels: Reenactment as Nostalgia and Defense of the Confederacy in the Battle of Aiken,” James O. Farmer addresses the question of whether the

³⁷ Lain Hart, “Authentic recreation: living history and leisure,” (*Museum and Society*, 5: No. 2, July 2007) 106.

people who participate in Civil War reenactments as Confederate soldiers want to genuinely learn about history or if they want to *be* Confederate soldiers. This distinction is important to note within the hobby since some Southerners feel that their heritage is being repressed and believe reenactment is a way to keep it alive. Farmer also argues that this sentiment is not unique to Civil War reenacting, but also across many other time periods.

Christopher Bates makes some of the same arguments as Farmer when explaining why so many people are drawn to be Confederate reenactors. He states that many people have an idealized version of Southern culture during the 19th century, and, for many Southerners, this testament remains true. This idea is described as the “Lost Cause,” which is a “blend of romance and politics” that still resonates with many of the reenactors today.³⁸ Farmer’s and Bates’s articles discuss the challenges reenactors face when it comes to educating visitors about the past at historic sites. These views have to be taken very seriously if a historic site wants to use reenactors, especially if their dialogue might contradict what the site is trying to teach. These reasons are not unique to Civil War reenacting; they apply to many periods of reenactments, and the implications they might have on living history programming.

³⁸ 11. Christopher Bates, “Oh, I’m a Good Ol’ Rebel”: Reenactment, Racism, and the Lost Cause.” in *The Civil War in Popular Culture: Meaning and Memory*, ed. Randal Allred and Lawrence A. Kreiser (University Press of Kentucky, 2014) 195.

Chapter 3

The History of Reenactment

Origins of Reenactment

Reenactment events have a long history that can be traced back to Ancient Roman times and have evolved throughout the centuries to become what people participate in today. In earlier days, there were different motivations for people to put on reenactments or to participate in them compared to modern times. The interpretation of reenactment changed throughout time from something that was used quite literally to interpret past battles, to a teaching tool used at many living history museums and historic sites. This chapter will explore the vastly different forms and motivations of reenactments throughout the centuries.

The Ancient Romans were the first civilization to record reenactments throughout their empire. The events took place in amphitheaters, open-air venues used for multiple types of entertainment.³⁹ These reenactments were performed for Roman citizens to share their sense of national unity against other cultural groups in Europe.⁴⁰ Slaves and prisoners would reenact multiple battle campaigns where they defeated different groups of people throughout the expansive Roman empire. Many of these reenactments were ordered by the emperor, and the combatants were typically killed for the entertainment of the audience. The people forced to reenact fought with the weapons they would have used in the actual battle, which also occurs today, but they used the weapons to kill instead of using them as a teaching tool. In modern day reenactments, the weapons are not fired with live ammunition, and the knives, swords or bayonets are typically dulled. There is speculation by historians that the Flavian Amphitheatre was flooded to reenact naval victories, but there is no concrete evidence about Roman naval

³⁹ Roland Auget, *Cruelty and Civilization: The Roman Games* (London: Routledge, 1994), 82.

⁴⁰ Roland Auget, *Cruelty and Civilization: The Roman Games*, 85.

reenactments. The Romans partook in these types of reenactments for centuries and the foundations of these events eventually evolved into an event that resembles modern-day military-themed living history programs.

“Pageantry” Reenactments

In 17th century England, mock battles and reenactments grew in popularity. The first known reenactment to take place in England was put on in 1638 by Lord James ‘Jimmy’ Dunn of Coniston. He organized a staged battle that took place between the Christian and Muslim forces during the Crusades. A short time later, in 1645, a battle was reenacted from the English Civil War that was still ongoing at the time.⁴¹ These types of reenactments started to become more popular throughout Europe and were slowly becoming the building blocks of what reenactments are today.

In the 19th century, reenacting became more widespread in Europe. Many people wanted to reenact the romantic ideals from the Middle Ages to serve as an escape from the Industrial Age in Europe. People sought a way to revert to the romanticism of knights, large feasts, and castles, and one of the ways to do this was through public theatrical events and role-playing. One of the first reenactment events that drew a large crowd was the Eglinton Tournament of 1839, organized by Archibald Montgomerie, 13th Earl of Eglinton (Figure 1). The tournament drew 100,000 spectators and was set during the Medieval Period. The event featured 13 knights on horseback. A sense of romanticism was evoked since the Earl of Eglinton requested the spectators to wear the period dress to revitalize Medieval aspects for the event.⁴² This could be a

⁴¹ C.H. Firth, *Cromwell’s Army; A History of the English Soldier during the Civil Wars, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate* (London: Methuen, 1962) 399.

⁴² Ian Anstruther. *The Knight and the Umbrella: An Account of the Eglinton Tournament*. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1963) 246.

reason why military-themed living history events and tactical demonstrations have grown in popularity over the years. Many people want to revert to their sense of what the world was like in ‘simpler times,’ and role-playing is a way to escape, like going to Renaissance Fairs. The idea of reenactment was changed from literal battles and people dying for the entertainment of others to romantic visions of the past where some visitors would also dress up and pretend like they are stepping into the past.



Figure 1. Lithograph of *The Joust Between The Lord of The Tournament and The Knight of The Red Rose*; reenactment that took place in 1839.

Source: Art of the Print

Veterans Commemorating Their Own Past

Also, in the 19th century, a new motivation developed in the world of reenacting. Veterans started to commemorate their own history by donning their old uniforms and weapons for various reasons, including celebrating their victory or paying homage to the men who lost their lives in war. The first such recorded reenactment took place in the United States in 1822. It was a small-scale event involving 20 Revolutionary War veterans who reenacted their 1775 clash with British soldiers at Lexington, MA, to relive their victory.⁴³ This event spurred the idea of veterans recreating the battles that they physically experienced.

The Great Reunion of 1913, held at Gettysburg, was a large and important event that took place in the United States. This event celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg that and was attended by more than 50,000 Union and Confederate veterans from 46 states.⁴⁴ What makes The Great Reunion different from modern-day reenactments is that Civil War veterans participated, not just hobbyists who take part in programming on the weekends. The veterans reenacted one of the most well-known Civil War battles, Pickett's Charge, along with other skirmishes that took place.⁴⁵ This reenactment was more than veterans meeting together—it was a sign of national unity. Although there was fear that the reunion between the former Confederate and Union soldiers could turn hostile, the gathering remained peaceful for the entirety of the five-day event. President Woodrow Wilson gave a speech on July 4, 1913 that summarized the peaceful spirit of the event: “We have found one another again as brothers and

⁴³ Jenny Thompson, *War Games: Inside the World of 20th Century War Reenactments*. (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004) xiii.

⁴⁴ Erin McCann, “Civil War Veterans at Gettysburg anniversary in 1913- in pictures,” *The Guardian*, July 1, 2013, Accessed on February 13, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2013/jul/01/civil-war-gettysburg-anniversary-pictures>.

⁴⁵ Lewis Eugene Beitler, *Fiftieth Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg: Report of the Pennsylvania Commission, Presented to His Excellency, John K. Tener, Governor of Pennsylvania, for Transmittal to the General Assembly*, (Harrisburg, PA: Wm. Stanley Ray, State Printer, 1913).

comrades in arms, enemies no longer, generous friends rather, our battles long past, the quarrel forgotten—except that we shall not forget the splendid valor.”⁴⁶



Figure 2. The Gettysburg Battlefield filled with tents during the Great Reunion of 1913. The small caption on the picture states “Gettysburg Camp, 50th Anniversary, July 1913.”

Source: Library of Congress.

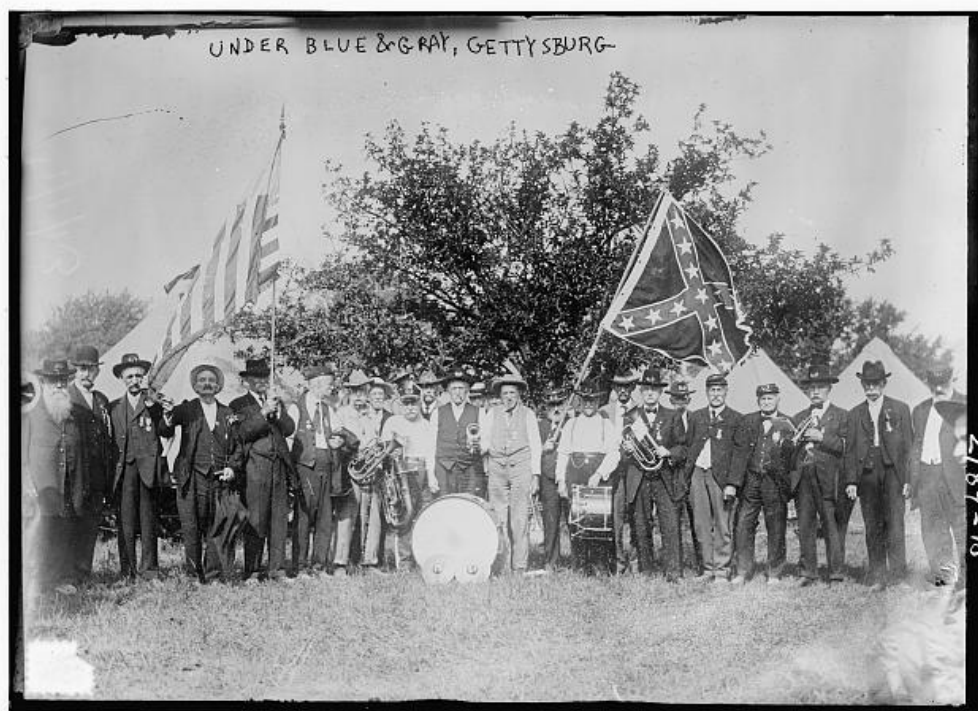


Figure 3. Photograph titled “*Under Blue & Gray, Gettysburg.*” This picture was taken at the Great Reunion of 1913 and shows the former Union and Confederate veterans from the Battle of Gettysburg.

Source: Library of Congress.

⁴⁶ Angelo M. Codevilla, “Ending America’s Civil War, and Restarting It,” Hoover Institution, July 7, 2016, Accessed on February 24, 2020. <https://www.hoover.org/research/ending-americas-civil-war-and-restarting-it>.

Reenactments as an Interpretive Tool

The next step in the evolution of reenacting was a shift from a veteran-centered activity to a “hobby” and “interpretive tool” that was used at living history museums and historic sites. Shifting the focus of these events to audience education began in the 1960s with the United States Revolutionary War and Civil War reenactments, most notably the Civil War Centennial. In the 20th century, reenactments associated with World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War also gained popularity. The public has a fascination with these wars, where more than veterans are becoming involved with the reenactment community.

World War II has the most reenactments associated with it in the United States and Europe because people are very intrigued with its history. One of the oldest World War II reenactment societies, founded in 1975, is the World War II Historical Reenactment Society, Inc., or HRS. The HRS members were trailblazers in the World War II reenacting scene and have since gained over 1,200 members for their organization to perform reenactments around the United States. Their mission statement is “More Majorum” or “In the tradition of those before us,” and they “strive to honor and preserve the memory of those who served in World War II, as well as the artifacts of that period.”⁴⁷ The HRS goes one step beyond only performing reenactments on the weekends, as do many other World War II reenactments societies. Some of the men and women are educators that travel to schools and other educational events venues to teach students about the soldiers’ lives, uniforms, weapons, and vehicles used in World War II that changed the course of the war. Throughout the United States and Europe, reenactment has steadily become an educational tool that creates a new purpose to what was once only a way to escape into the past.

⁴⁷ World War II Reenactment Society Inc., “About Us,” Accessed on February 12, 2020, <http://www.worldwartwohrs.org/index.htm>.

Korean and Vietnam War reenactments are not as popular as some people see these wars as too controversial or too recent in history to reenact. However, both wars have small events scattered throughout the United States. Some tactical reenactments that take place are General Douglas MacArthur's amphibious invasion with the Allied forces at Inchon, South Korea, in 1950, and patrol missions that took place in Vietnam. Vietnam reenacting units are established in North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Kentucky, as well as Belgium, France, and Poland.⁴⁸ Many people who reenact World War II are transitioning into the Korean and Vietnam War realm of reenacting since there are some similarities in artifacts and reproduced uniforms. These reenactments are still new to many reenactors and the public. More Vietnam War veterans are alive in 2020 than any other war that is reenacted around the world. This statistic brings a different dynamic to the reenactors since the men who fought in the real battles in Vietnam, as well as in Korea and World War II, are present to tell their own stories.

In contemporary times, reenacting is mostly used at historic sites for educational purposes thus changing the motivation of the activity once again in history.⁴⁹ Throughout time, people are intrigued about war and history. They will interpret their own history to best fit their society, whether it be by literally interpreting the battle or as an educational experience using material culture objects to teach about the past.

⁴⁸ Jenny Thompson, *War Games: Inside the World of 20th Century War Reenactments*. (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004) 48.

⁴⁹ A list of the most prominent eras of that people reenact is found in Appendix 1.

Chapter 4

Case Studies

Many people are familiar with the Gettysburg National Military Park, where various reenactments are performed annually, and is one of the most popular sites for battlefield tourism in the country according to the American Battlefield Trust. Annual attendance averages 1 to 2 million people a year.⁵⁰ The two case studies featured in this essay are of lesser known sites but of equal historical significance. The case studies use real-world reenactment events and will be used to examine the educational effectiveness of the reenactments previously discussed. Old Fort Niagara is a New York State historic site, and D-Day Conneaut, is a private consortium of reenactors and community stakeholders at a public town park in Conneaut, OH (Figure 4). Both case studies provide an illustrative basis for conclusions relative to the effectiveness of reenactment as a tool for historic interpretation. They demonstrate the differences between a historic site and a non-historic site involving reenactments. Both sites have unique challenges as public military-themed events, such as public safety, space restraints, and ideological considerations. Each site is striving to alleviate these shortcomings with strict guidelines and the addition of supplemental activities to their events to engage their visitors more effectively.

The author has attended events at both Old Fort Niagara and D-Day Conneaut and chose them to illustrate the similarities and differences of how these organizations put on public events and programming. She also conducted a ten question survey that was completed by men and women who reenact in the United States. The survey included questions such as how many years people have reenacted for, where they reenact, why they reenact and why they think reenacting is

⁵⁰ American Battlefield Trust, "Battlefield Visitation Trends," Accessed on May 9, 2021, <https://www.battlefields.org/preserve/battlefield-visitation-trends>.

an important aspect to have at living history museums and historic sites. These survey answers have helped her develop her conclusions in the paper.

While Old Fort Niagara has multiple prominent public military-themed living history events, D-Day Conneaut has one large annual event that draws thousands of visitors from across the country and the world to participate in and attend. Located in the Northeastern United States, these sites are sources of military history from the French and Indian War (1756-1763) to World War II (1939-1945). Both have large scale battle demonstrations and encampments that immerse visitors into the lives of soldiers from different periods.

Old Fort Niagara, located in Youngstown, NY, is one of America's oldest military forts, opened in 1726 (Figure 5). The fort, museum, and battlefield have been open to the public as a historic site since 1934 according to their website. Thanks to local interest to preserve the fort and its history, people from around the world can learn about its one-of-a-kind architecture and history that spans almost 300 years.

D-Day Conneaut is an annual event in Conneaut Town Park, OH that portrays the Normandy Invasion by the Allied forces on June 6, 1944 (Figure 6). The section of shoreline along Lake Erie was meticulously chosen as the reenactment site in an effort to accurately represent the landscape of the Normandy Invasion. As the largest annual D-Day reenactment in the United States, D-Day Conneaut is a massive public demonstration with over a thousand reenactors.



Figure 4. Map of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Canada illustrating where D-Day Conneaut and Old Fort Niagara are located.
 Source: Google Maps

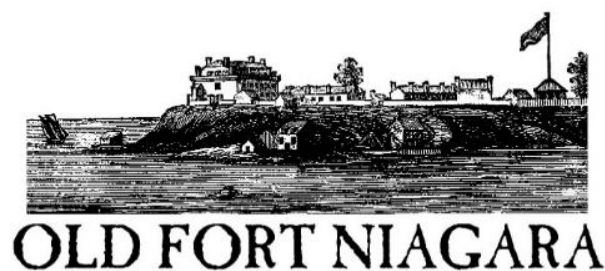


Figure 5. Old Fort Niagara Logo
 Source: Old Fort Niagara



Figure 6. D-Day Ohio, Inc. Logo
 Source: D-Day Ohio, Inc.

Case Study: Old Fort Niagara

History of Old Fort Niagara

The Niagara River was known as the "Gateway to the West," since it connects Lake Ontario with Lake Erie, allowing travel across all the Great Lakes.⁵¹ France was the first European nation to explore the Niagara region and built two outposts, one in 1679 and the other in 1687, with neither of them lasting more than a year.⁵² Once the French returned to the Niagara Frontier in 1726, they received permission from the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) to build a permanent building adjacent to the Niagara River. The French were able to construct the "Maison a Machicoulis" or "Machicolated House," which had overhanging dormers on the attic level that allowed for defense positions and to shoot artillery from. This structure finally gave France a secure foothold on the Niagara River in 1726 (Figures 7 and 8). The Machicolated House was the sole building at this site for about 20 years and was self-sufficient. The term "French Castle" was given to the structure during the 20th century; it is the most recognizable building at the Fort.⁵³

During the French and Indian War, Fort Niagara was captured by the British in 1759 after a 19-day siege. The Fort was used as Britain's Great Lake headquarters during the American Revolution and became a refuge for loyalists and Native American allies. During this time, the British started to make improvements to the Fort, such as building the North and South Redoubts as fortifying structures, which are still standing today. In 1796, Jay's Treaty was signed, which required the British to turn over all their posts and forts to the United States. In August of 1796,

⁵¹Brian Leigh Dunnigan, *A History and Guide to Old Fort Niagara: Revised and Expanded Edition*. (Old Fort Niagara Association Inc., 2007) 5.

⁵² Brian Leigh Dunnigan and Patricia Kay Scott, *Old Fort Niagara in Four Centuries: A History of its Development*. (Old Fort Niagara Association, Inc., 1991) 6.

⁵³ Brian Leigh Dunnigan and Patricia Kay Scott, *Old Fort Niagara in Four Centuries: A History of its Development*, 20.

with the United States in possession of Fort Niagara, the first American troops marched into the Fort. During the war of 1812, the British attacked Fort Niagara in December of 1813 but were only able to hold Fort Niagara for 17 months until the end of the war. The Treaty of Ghent officially ended the war in 1815, and the United States reoccupied the Fort on May 22, 1815.⁵⁴ The United States Army continued to occupy the Fort for the next 100 years. During World War I, the Fort was used as a training base for soldiers being deployed overseas.

The United States Army ceased using the "old" fort as an active fortification following the Civil War, due to the improvements in military weapons and the need for more space. Many temporary wooden barracks were constructed, in what is today Fort Niagara State Park, to house the large influx of soldiers living at the Fort.⁵⁵ When the United States entered World War II, Fort Niagara was used as a prisoner of war camp and a training base, yet on a smaller scale than how it was used in World War I. After World War II, the Fort was used for emergency housing for veterans. In 1963, the United States Army officially ceded the land that the Fort was located on to the State of New York.⁵⁶ The United States Coast Guard Station is the only military presence next to the historic site today.

Military Fort to Historic Site

The Old Fort Niagara Association began in 1927, with the intention of the Fort one day becoming a museum for people from around the world to appreciate and learn the Niagara Frontier's history. There were over 250 buildings on the grounds during the Fort's history, yet the

⁵⁴ Brian Leigh Dunnigan, *A History and Guide to Old Fort Niagara: Revised and Expanded Edition*. (Old Fort Niagara Association Inc., 2007) 36.

⁵⁵ N.Y. State Park and Historic Sites, "Training the Doughboys," October 10, 2017, Accessed on March 12, 2020. <https://nystateparks.blog/tag/world-war-1/>.

⁵⁶ Brian Leigh Dunnigan, *A History and Guide to Old Fort Niagara: Revised and Expanded Edition*. (Old Fort Niagara Association Inc., 2007) 49.

ones that remain have some of the most vibrant history. These buildings include the Provisions Storehouse, the Powder Magazine, the Dauphin Battery, the Gate of Five Nations, the South Redoubt, the North Redoubt, the "French Castle," and the Bakehouse.

William Wallace Kincaid, the first President of the Old Fort Niagara Association, was the driving force behind Fort Niagara's restoration. The Association started the Fort's restoration project, which ran from 1927-1934, to convert the Fort into a museum.⁵⁷ The Association received financial assistance from the United States Army and private donations to make the restoration process successful.⁵⁸ The Old Fort Niagara Association received support from different groups, such as the Knights of Columbus, the Western New York Chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), the Erie County American Legion, and the U.S. Daughters of 1812, who were willing to help with the restoration effort. On August 1, 1926, Alfred G. Adams completed the floor plan for the French Castle, adhering as closely as possible to the original floor plan of 1726.

Most of the early 20th century buildings that were located outside of the Fort's original walls were removed in the 1960s to make room for the vast green spaces that are now Fort Niagara State Park. The Fort was registered as a National Historic Landmark on October 9, 1960 and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 15, 1966.⁵⁹ The historic site is currently operated by the private non-profit Old Fort Niagara Association, but is owned by the State of New York and falls under the authority of New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The private non-profit organization must answer to and

⁵⁷ Old Fort Niagara, "History of Old Fort Niagara," Accessed on January 28, 2020, <https://www.oldfortniagara.org/history>.

⁵⁸ Brian Leigh Dunnigan, *Glorious Old Relic: The French Castle and Old Fort Niagara*. (Old Fort Niagara Association Inc., 1987) 89.

⁵⁹ Brian Leigh Dunnigan, *A History and Guide to Old Fort Niagara: Revised and Expanded Edition*. (Old Fort Niagara Association Inc., 2007) 45-51.

cooperate with the New York State Office of Parks. This relationship affects the Fort's operations and living history programming, including reenactments. All of these organizations working together make Fort Niagara a 'mixed breed' historic site and a rarity in the United States.⁶⁰



Figure 7. French Castle in 1874, prior to restoration.

Source: Glorious Old Relic: The French Castle and Old Fort Niagara, by Brian Leigh Dunnigan.



Figure 8. French Castle in 2018.

Source: Glenn, October 18, 2018.

Fort Niagara also has a traditional museum located within the visitor center (Figure 10). Before visitors even enter the 'Old' Fort Niagara area outside, they can see what the Fort would have looked like in the past. This interpretive effort was designed to give visitors a panoramic view of the Fort's rooftops through the windows. There were earthen mounds and ditches dug in front of the Fort that helped to fortify the buildings against an artillery attack. These structures cannot be seen from a distance, helping to deceive the enemies. In Figure 9 is the signage that

⁶⁰ Reenactor and military history enthusiast Douglas W. DeCroix coined the term 'mix breed' when describing Old Fort Niagara while meeting with the author.

illustrates this feat of engineering and helps the visitor understand the importance of the earthworks.

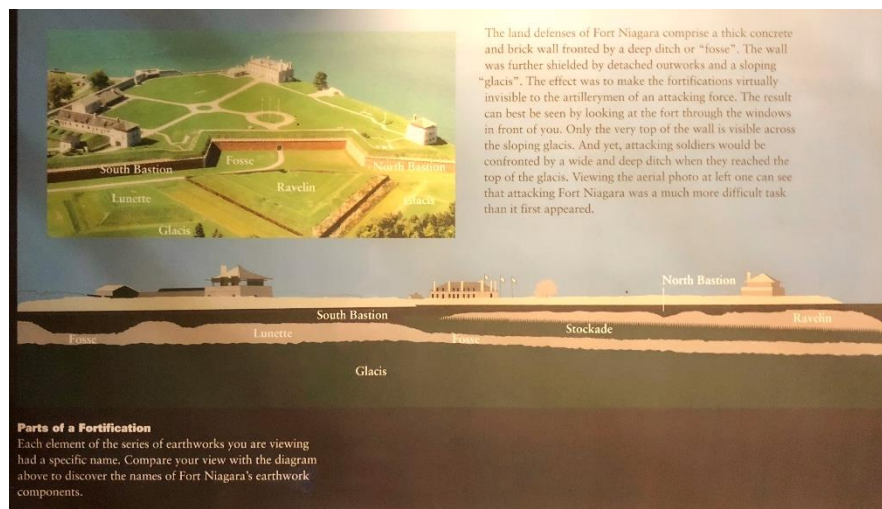


Figure 9. Interpretive signage in Fort Niagara's Visitor Center describing the importance of the earthworks in front of the Fort.

Source: Glenn, October 2018.

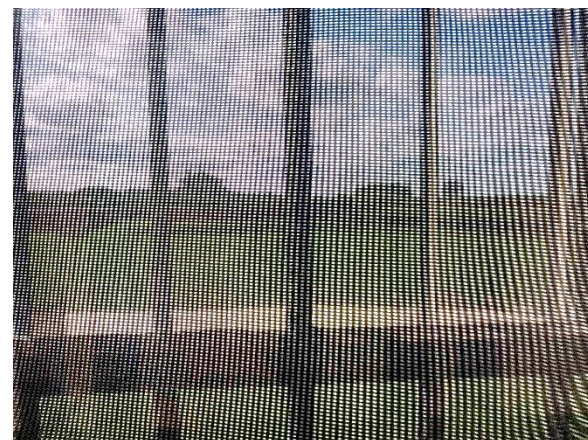


Figure 10. The view out of the Visitor Center looking at Fort Niagara.

Source: Glenn, October 2018.

Public Programming at Old Fort Niagara

Old Fort Niagara employs a variety of interpretive tools that help its visitors engage with the presented history. These include a visitor center that consists of a traditional museum, living history programming for children and adults, and an impressive and robust schedule of special events, many of which are reenactments (Figure 11). These programs help to augment the Fort's expansive archeological collection and the original architecture. Some of the programs offered are: French Heritage Days; the Haunted Fortress, where ghost tours are available for the public during October; Fall Frontier days offered to fourth-graders in Western New York; and the Castle by Candlelight, where the French Castle is decorated for Christmas. The vast majority of

these permanent annual events are staffed by the Fort's interpretive staff with help from members of their volunteer program.

In addition to their year-round programming, Fort Niagara also boasts a robust calendar of reenactments, which, in addition to the Fort's staff of historic interpreters, utilizes outside reenactors and living historians. During reenactment events, the Fort is transformed into an entire encampment of soldiers with muskets and cannons firing. Ensuring a multi-sensory experience, the smell of homemade food baking in the French ovens of the Bake House permeates the air. The Fort's most significant and largest reenactment events are the Siege of 1759, during the French and Indian War, and the British attack on December 18, 1813, during the War of 1812 (Figures 16, 17, and 18 in Appendix 3). The dedicated interpretive staff and reenactors make the experience even more fulfilling with their vast historical knowledge.

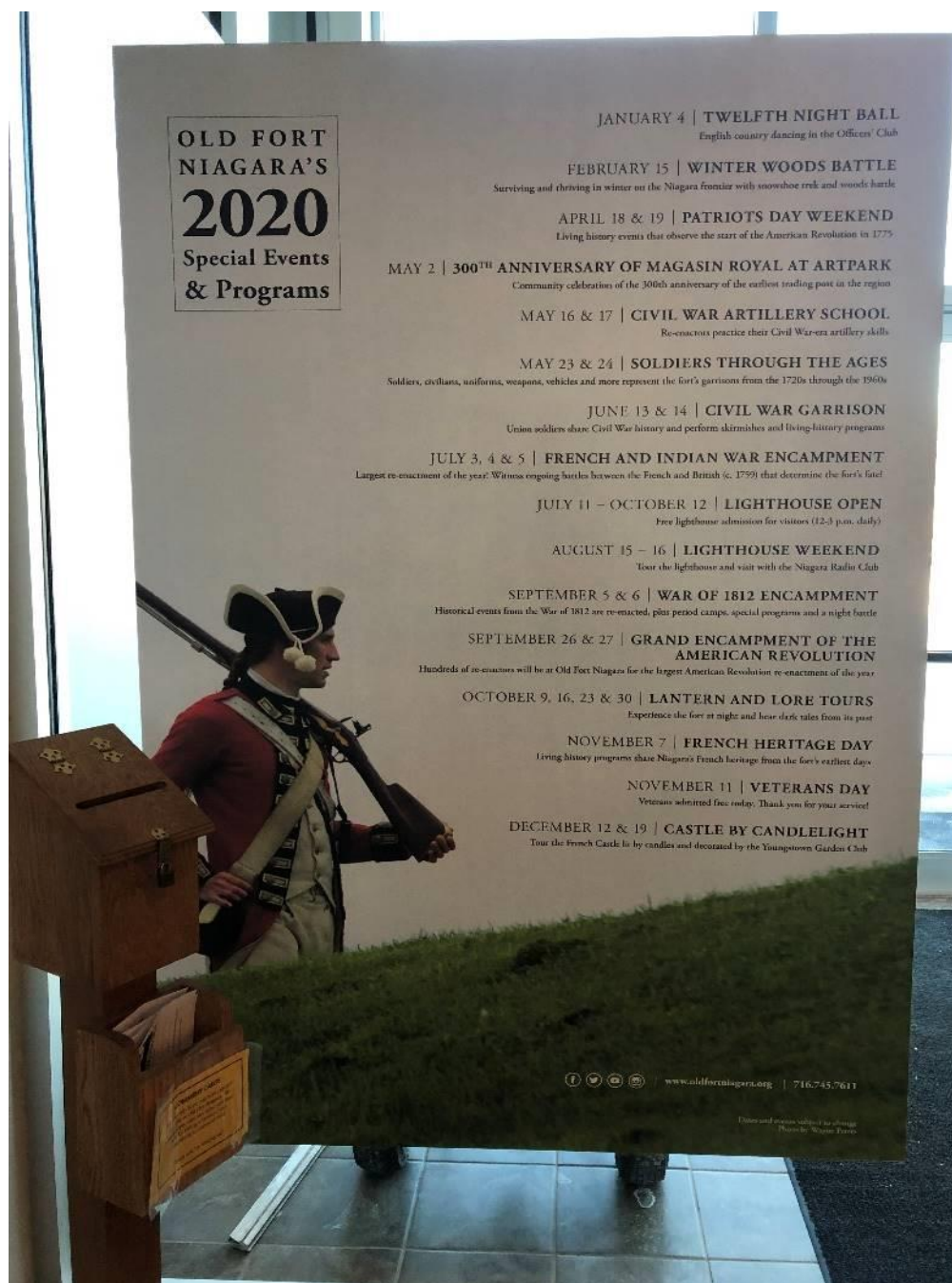


Figure 11. Schedule of Old Fort Niagara events for 2020. Located in Old Fort Niagara's Visitor Center.

Source: Glenn, January 22, 2020.

Topographical Issues at Old Fort Niagara

Every historic site or historical society that organizes public programming events must consider how much space they have available for a program. Fort Niagara can use the majority of the space that is part of the historic or 'old' section of the Fort for larger scale reenactments

while accommodating a viewing area for visitors. One of the most popular battle demonstrations is the attack that occurred on December 19, 1813. During the attack, 562 British soldiers assaulted Fort Niagara catching the United States soldiers off guard and causing 80 fatalities. This battle works well to reenact because historians know how many soldiers participated in this conflict and, generally, what took place. This event can be reenacted similarly to how it actually happened because the buildings and grounds are almost the same as they were in 1813. Yet, the reenactment only depicts a fraction of the actual assault, since there were originally three columns of soldiers. Recreating at least one of the columns accurately would require reenactors to climb historic and fragile walls. The staff must scale down what they demonstrate to accommodate the number of reenactors in proportion to the topography, so that the number of reenactors does not look unrealistic in the given space. A truly unique aspect of the War of 1812 reenactment is that it can be performed in real time. The attack only took about 20 minutes, which offers the opportunity for the Fort to reenact it in the actual amount of time it took place. The Fort typically performs this reenactment at the end of August or the beginning of September each year during the evening. Yet, this is actually the opposite of what happened; while the reenactment is done at night, the attack in 1813 was in the early morning. This reenactment is done in the evening to mimic the early hours of the morning and it is easier for the staff planning the event as well as attendees (Figure 19 in Appendix 3).

Additionally, there are other reenactment limitations that Fort Niagara must consider, such as performance length. For example, the Siege of 1759, which lasted 19 days, must be drastically scaled down into a three-day event. These are a few examples of the limitations that historic sites must consider when conducting reenactments. Part of the educational programming

is to inform visitors of the actual events and limitations posed by current conditions.

Safety Protocols for the Participants and the Visitors

All public events at Fort Niagara, including the reenactments are carefully choreographed and scripted. This is necessary for many historic site's public programs to ensure the safety of the visitors. The security of both visitors and participants needs to be given significant consideration in any such program. Having barriers, staff directing visitors where they can and cannot be on the grounds, and the reenactors committing their scripted actions to memory helps to mitigate the problem of any accident from happening. The original area of Fort Niagara is not that large in order to have both a full authentic reenactment and an audience to view it. The Old Fort Niagara Association has to scale down the programming, which does not mean turning reenactors away, but only opening the event to a certain number of reenactors at a time. Another safety consideration is families viewing the reenactments, especially with small children running around, which poses a challenge for their own as well as the reenactors' safety. Families attending battle reenactments is not unique to Old Fort Niagara; many historic sites have to factor in this important safety consideration. Loudspeakers are used to communicate the safety regulations to the visitors, as well as volunteers directing people where to view the events behind the rope barriers.

Strict rules are also in place for weapons that are used during the battle demonstrations. Most of these safety and weapons-related regulations come straight from the State of New York via the Fort's landlord, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Old Fort Niagara Association does not have a choice in the matter, unless they want to make rules that are stricter than the state versions. In the "Weapons and Black Powder

Regulations" section of the "General Participant Rules and Regulations for Old Fort Niagara Events," there are outlined instructions indicating what age reenactors and historic interpreters have to be to use weapons, the specific dimensions of the weapons that can be used and the black powder requirements for the guns. During reenactments, the people participating are not allowed to point their weapons at the visitors or other participants. They also must keep a certain distance away from each other because even though their weapons are not firing a projectile, the force that comes out is still hazardous.⁶¹ These rules have to be enforced by the Old Fort Niagara Association to ensure everyone's safety at the site.

Questions of Historic Representation

The interpretive staff and reenactors at Old Fort Niagara are dedicated men and women who try to give the visitors an authentic experience, but there are limitations. Old Fort Niagara has reenactor groups come to the Fort to portray different periods. These include the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and World War II. Following the history of Fort Niagara, reenactors portray Native Americans, military infantry, officers, women, and tradesmen during the programming events. The reenactors, along with the historic interpreters at the Fort, must be familiar with the "General Participant Rules and Regulations for Old Fort Niagara Events." This 25 page document outlines everything the reenactors need to know about camp life, outfits, and general behavior at the Fort.⁶² In the Authenticity section, there is a scale that explains the articles of clothing that a reenactor can wear, rated by best, better, acceptable, and unacceptable. The Rules and Regulations of this

⁶¹ Old Fort Niagara, "Old Fort Niagara Reenactor Information," Accessed on January 6, 2020, <https://www.oldfortniagara.org/information-for-reenactor>.

⁶² Two pages of the "General Participant Rules and Regulations for Old Fort Niagara Events" describing the authenticity requirements for the participants at Fort Niagara is in the appendix.

document go into immense detail for the reenactors to help them recreate authentic experiences for the visitors and each other. Research is vital for factual representation. The Fort's guidelines are put in place by the administrators, along with the rules and protocols for each reenactment group and must be based in solid research to provide a well-rounded and as accurate-as-possible portrayal. Reenactors need to consider that many visitors know their history and notice if they are wearing something that does not comply with the soldier or person they are portraying.

The popularity of Old Fort Niagara has led to many publications that have been published by the Old Fort Niagara Association and are available to reenactors and the public. These books can be used as solid research material that provide overviews about the history of the Fort, how the research into the history of the Fort has evolved as additional primary documents are uncovered, and the archaeological program that has been set up. These books include the *Glorious Old Relic: The French Castle and Old Fort Niagara* by Brian Leigh Dunnigan published in 1987, *Old Fort Niagara in Four Centuries: A History of its Development* by Brian Leigh Dunnigan and Patricia Kay Scott published in 1991 and *A History and Guide to Old Fort Niagara: Revised and Expanded Edition* by Brian Leigh Dunnigan published in 2007.

Since there are no veterans alive from when the Fort was an active military site, Fort Niagara is not able to benefit from its veteran's eyewitness accounts. Only paintings and archival material are available to provide insight into what life and battle were like at the Fort. These pieces of history help to recreate the brightly colored uniforms worn in battle so that other soldiers could see the enemy and their fellow comrades through the smoke caused by their weapons.

Like most historic sites that utilize living history programming, Fort Niagara also deals with the problem of accuracy versus inclusion. Native Americans played a significant role in

shaping the Niagara Frontier and had different alliances with the French, British, and the United States throughout history. Many contemporary Native Americans live near the Fort in Western New York, but not all want to portray their ancestors. This brings into question whether people of other nationalities should reenact as Native Americans. Fort Niagara's answer to this ideological question is that if the people follow all the regulations of the attire and know their history, then people of different nationalities can reenact as Native Americans. This question applies to all historic sites and public programming involving various nationalities of people wanting to portray another nation. For example, Fort Niagara attracts participants from around the world, such as a man from Europe choosing to reenact as a Native American, as seen in this National Geographic photograph (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Instagram picture and caption by Daniella Zalcman from National Geographic. Picture of a man named Markus Vollack from Switzerland who reenacts as a Native American at Old Fort Niagara.

Source: Instagram, March 2020.

There are also many discrepancies in the reenacting world when it comes to the accuracy of body size, age, and gender. Fort Niagara and other historic sites do not want to turn reenactors away since they have a passion for history, provide supplemental learning, and even photo

opportunities for visitors. During Fort Niagara's encampments, some women reenact as male soldiers, creating a place for inclusion, but as a result, introducing historical inaccuracy. Visitors must be aware of these inclusion considerations when they visit historic sites since most aspects portrayed would not be accurate to what the soldiers or life looked like, but rather a place where a love for history is shared and discussed.

Discussion

Fort Niagara illustrates the highly specialized and uniquely built fortress that was modified throughout the past 300-years and currently serves as a historic site with programming for visitors. The original structures help the visitors visualize what the Fort would have looked like during different time periods. Interpretive staff and reenactors can use the original buildings in their tours or reenactments. Yet, there is a cost to having 300-year-old buildings kept safe and restored for visitors to experience and learn from. The original structures bring a sense of wonder and curiosity and make the reenactments feel more authentic with them as a backdrop.

Programming has been going on for decades, and a well-informed and trained interpretive staff helps with understanding the importance of Fort Niagara over time. Fort Niagara's archaeological program also helps collect material culture to give the visitors an educational and enjoyable experience. The material culture is also prevalent in teaching the visitors about the history that took place at the Fort. The Fort has the resources and workforce to create this type of programming throughout the year. The administration does not have the luxury to focus on one event per year, whereas they are always planning and working out the details for the next program. Since it is a hybrid site, with the non-profit organization being in New York State's possession, there are some restrictions on reenactments that the staff has to

consider when planning their programs. In many ways, Fort Niagara is an effective place to learn about history making many aspects of the past tangible for the visitors through reenactment.

Case Study: D-Day Conneaut

History of D-Day Conneaut

D-Day Conneaut is a military-themed living history event that takes place every August in Conneaut, OH. It portrays the infamous D-Day landing and other small battles that took place in Northern France in 1944. The reenactment initially started as a private event in Conneaut Township Park in Ashtabula County, OH, in 1999, when a small group of people wanted to relive the events of D-Day. Over the years, park visitors started watching the reenactment from a bluff overlooking the beach. This reenactment started to draw a larger crowd each summer. A dedicated group of volunteers decided to create an event called D-Day Conneaut that would be “the largest and most historically accurate D-Day Living History Reenactment in the country,” and thus D-Day Ohio, Incorporated was officially formed in 2007.⁶³ D-Day Ohio, Inc.’s mission statement is to “educate about and commemorate the Normandy Invasion of June 6, 1944, predominantly through living history,” which clearly states their intentions and goals of using living history and reenactment as an educational tool for interpreting the past.⁶⁴

Having one of the most well-known historical battles that occurred in France portrayed in the United States might be confusing; however, the volunteers and reenactors wanted to take advantage of this unique shoreline along Lake Erie. From humble beginnings, the event has grown to include over 1,500 dedicated volunteers and participants each year. Around 45,000 visitors attend annually to learn about the home front of the Allied forces, the beaches of Normandy, and the weaponry that evolved throughout World War II.⁶⁵ This military event

⁶³ D-Day Ohio, Inc., “D-Day Ohio About Us,” Accessed on February 1, 2020, <https://www.ddayohio.us/about-us.html>.

⁶⁴ D-Day Ohio, Inc., “D-Day Ohio About Us,” Accessed on February 1, 2020, <https://www.ddayohio.us/about-us.html>.

⁶⁵ Bob Batz Jr, “The Allies once again will storm the beaches at Normandy, but on Lake Erie, at D-Day Conneaut,” The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, July 22, 2019, <https://www.post->

embodies what a dedicated group of volunteers and reenactors can do to keep an audience engaged year after year.

A recent addition to D-Day Conneaut is the North Coast World War II History Museum. Opened in 2016, the museum supplements the programming that is presented at the D-Day Conneaut event. The museum building was originally the First Hungarian Reformed Church, built-in 1914, and was generously donated to D-Day Conneaut in 2012. The museum has displays about the home front effort in Northeastern Ohio during the war and other memorabilia from the people at home and abroad. There are display cases located throughout the building and on the former altar of the church. The museum allows visitors to dive deeper into the rich history with many textiles and papers that would deteriorate in the summer humidity if displayed outdoors during the D-Day Conneaut event. The museum has traditional interpretive models, such as exhibits and plaques, which focus on the local impacts of World War II in northeast Ohio. The museum is an effective tool that bridges the physical combat in Europe to the measures taken on the home front in the United States. This museum helps to capture the history that is unique to the people of northeastern Ohio.

History of the Normandy Invasion

During World War II, Dwight D. Eisenhower told United States military troops: “You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you.”⁶⁶ This speech was given on June 6, 1944, which many

<https://www.gazette.com/life/travel/2019/07/22/D-Day-Conneaut-Ohio-reenactment-World-War-II-75th-anniversary-beach-boats/stories/201907070011>.

⁶⁶ “Transcript of General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Order of the Day (1944),” Our Documents, Accessed on February 1, 2020. <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=75&page=transcript>.

historians say was the beginning of the end of World War II in the European theatre. The Battle of Normandy, which lasted from June 1944 to August 1944, was planned over two years in advance under the codename Operation Overlord. The Allied forces launched a campaign to free German-occupied Europe. Operation Neptune was the naval component of Operation Overlord to get allied troops and supplies across the English Channel. The Germans thought that the intended invasion target was Pas-de-Calais since it was the narrowest point between Britain and France. The Germans were caught off guard on the morning of June 6, 1944. Allied forces landed on five beaches across a 50 mile stretch of the French coastline. The Normandy Invasion was the largest amphibious landing that has ever been attempted in history.⁶⁷ The first day of the operation included 156,000 Allied troops who were primarily American, British, and Canadian soldiers. The campaign consisted of 5,000 ships and landing crafts, 50,000 vehicles, 11,000 aircraft, and 13,000 paratroopers. The most substantial resistance by the Germans occurred at Omaha Beach, with over 2,000 United States casualties. The Normandy invasion was a tremendous success that turned the tide for the Allies in the war, and 11 months later, on May 8, 1945, the Allies accepted the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany.⁶⁸ D-Day Conneaut aims to give its visitors a sense of what this monumental day in history might have been like.

Topographical Issues at D-Day Conneaut

The D-Day Conneaut event occurs in Conneaut Township Park, which is 60 acres. It is quickly outgrowing the park's space (Figure 13). The reason this particular park was chosen for

⁶⁷ History Channel, "D-Day," June 5, 2019, Accessed on February 1, 2020. https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/d-day#section_3.

⁶⁸"D-Day Ohio, Inc. Official Souvenir Program," *Gazette Newspapers*, (Conneaut, Ohio), August 2019.

the event, as compared to other beaches located along the Great Lakes, was because it has a 250-yard-long beach on the shore of Lake Erie with a steep hill at the end of the beach. This topography closely resembles Omaha Beach in Normandy, France, which gives visitors an idea of what the actual battleground could have looked like and also impacts the authenticity of the reenactment.

With only 60 acres on which to hold the event, the task of conducting a huge tactical demonstration while also establishing multiple encampments for different nationalities, a safe viewing area for visitors and modern support services ranging from porta-potties to food and commercial vendors, presents several geographical and topographical challenges. On one side of the park are the Allied forces, which include the Commonwealth composed of Canadians, British and Australian troops, the United States Airborne, and the Allied home front (Figure 21 and 22 in Appendix 4). D-Day Conneaut tries to accurately show how the different nations involved in the Normandy Invasions would have camped, yet the Allied home front is placed right next to the United States Airborne units deployed in Europe (Figure 23 in Appendix 4). It is difficult to get a sense of what life would have been like as a soldier in German-occupied France when there is an example of a victory garden in window boxes right next to the soldiers' tents. This issue has to do with the space constraints within the park. The organizers try to educate the public about everything that was happening in Europe during World War II, while also including the non-combative areas. In the middle of the park is the French Resistance Camp and Occupied France that includes a German bivouac or a temporary camp without many tents or cover. On the far side of the park are the German Forces camp, which is composed of the German garrison area and the German coastal bivouac. On the shores of the lake are the Allied Codenamed beaches and the "Atlantic Wall," or in this case, the "Lake Erie Wall," built by the Germans. The German

camp may be on the other side of the park, but it is only 100 meters away from the Allied camps. In actuality, the camps between the Allied and Axis powers would never have been this close together. This is one example of the significant limitations that occur at the D-Day Conneaut event.

Given that D-Day Conneaut is a commercialized event, there are outside vendors throughout the park. As visitors walk from the Allied camp to the German camp, they walk through a row of food vendors ranging from hot dogs to fried dough, past the souvenir tent, and porta-potties before they reach the German camp. It is hard to imagine authentic camp life when some camps are next to tennis courts, nearly in the backyard of nearby Conneaut residents, or with the aroma of fried food lingering in the air. D-Day Conneaut has many limitations when it comes to the space needed to depict a significant battle from World War II yet tries to teach the visitors many different aspects of the battle in a small space.

D-Day Conneaut

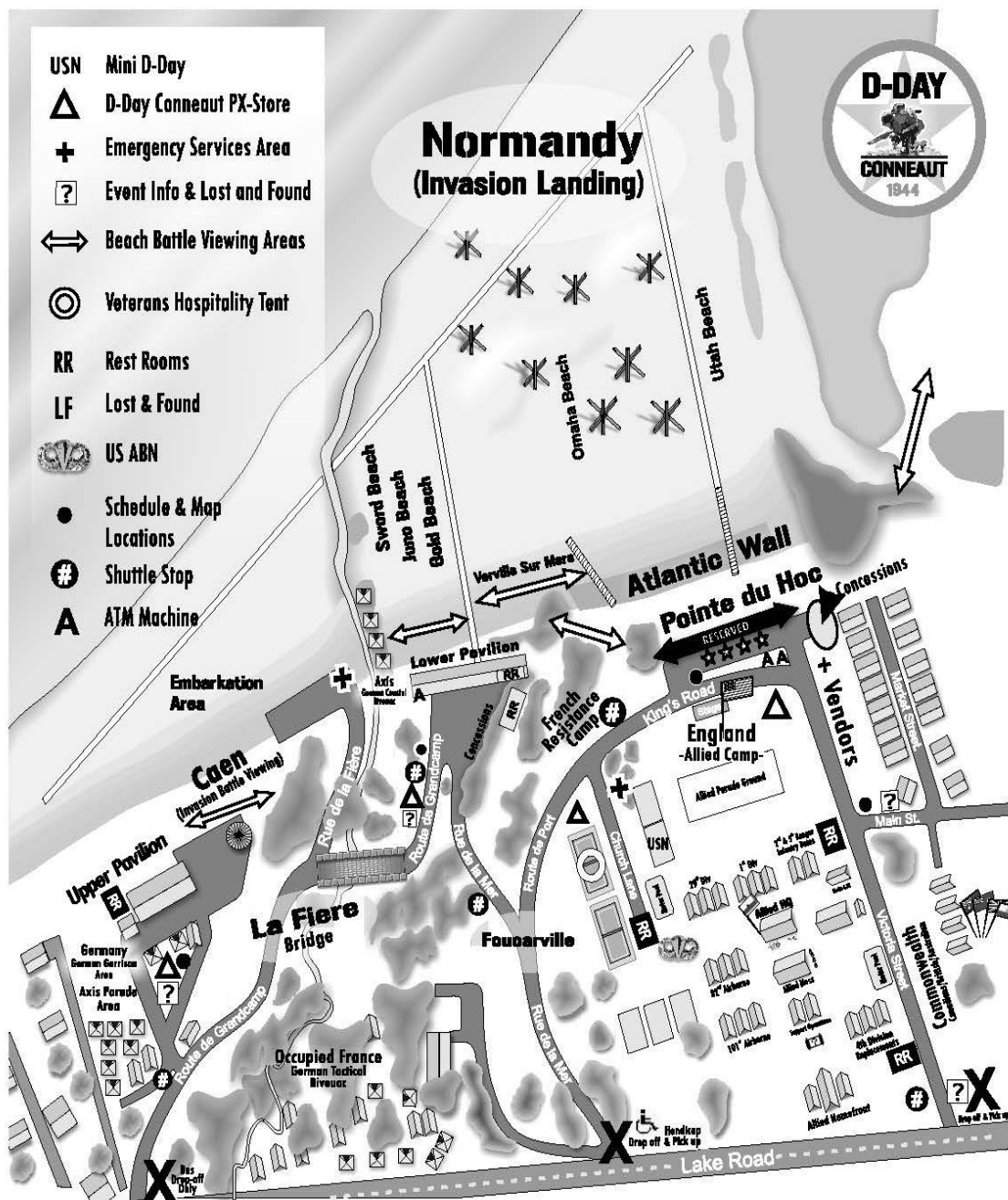


Figure 13. Map of the D-Day Conneaut grounds.

Source: D-Day Ohio, Inc.

As the event has grown in audience attendance, reenactors and additional battle reenactments, Conneaut has systematically incorporated a number of very unique elements to further enhance the visitor experience. These range from aircraft use in the tactical demonstrations, live explosions, and demonstrations of armored vehicles, large artillery, flamethrowers and bulldozers. There is even the option to ride in one of several historic vehicles used during the invasion. The year 2019 marked the 75th year of the Normandy invasions, and D-Day Conneaut added another one-of-a-kind experience for their visitors. During the 2019 event, the C-47 plane, known as the “Whiskey 7,” had flights available for visitors.⁶⁹ The C-47 was a large cargo plane vital for the shipment of goods for the Allied forces and for dropping paratroopers in certain operations. The specific plane used in 2019 belonged to the Geneseo National Warplane Museum in Geneseo, NY. This plane flew in the second wave of the Normandy Invasion, carrying paratroopers to drop down into occupied France. Each plane ride during the event was a half-hour long and flew visitors over the D-Day Conneaut grounds and the beautiful northeastern Ohio area (Figure 20 in Appendix 4).

In addition to the C-47 plane, the event provided free Higgins Boat rides at the Conneaut Public Docks, which are also used in the reenactment itself. Developed by Andrew Higgins, these boats have a drop-down front allowing for easy departure and are credited with helping the Allied troops land on beachheads and drop supplies. By the end of the war, 20,094 Higgins boats were produced. Having these two types of military technology available at the D-Day Conneaut event leads to a unique hands-on experience for visitors to participate in and can spark

⁶⁹ D-Day Ohio, Inc., “D-Day Ohio Event,” Accessed on February 1, 2020, <https://www.ddayohio.us/schedule.html>.

conversations about how these different modes of transportation helped the Allied forces become victorious in World War II.

As a result of providing so many activities, the D-Day Conneaut event suffers from having too many scheduled options thus creating an educational loss for the visitors. Having a jam-packed schedule is an incentive for visitors to come and learn the most about D-Day over the three-day event; however, overcrowding is a major issue. There are so many visitors it is hard to get from a demonstration in the Allied camp down to the beach for a German demonstration, all while maneuvering around the encampment, food vendors and merchandise areas.

Safety Protocols for the Participants and the Visitors

The staff at D-Day Conneaut must ensure that the event is a safe environment for both the reenactors and the visitors. To do this, all the reenactments, such as the D-Day landings or the Maquis (French Resistance) attacks, must be choreographed. Military-themed living history events have unique safety precautions compared to other living history-themed events. The D-Day Conneaut event uses a variety of weapons that are often more dangerous, such as tanks and flamethrowers, compared to weapons used in war reenactments from earlier times. There are D-Day Conneaut Safety Officers present at the event whose responsibility is to ensure that semi-automatic weapons are fitted with a blank fire adapter, and there is no live ammunition or wood-tipped blanks present on the grounds to ensure the safety of everybody involved.⁷⁰ Thousands of people of different ages visit D-Day Conneaut each year, and safety must be the top priority when the reenactors show various types of military equipment (Figure 14). Families with small

⁷⁰ D-Day Ohio, Inc., "D-Day Conneaut Safety Regulations," Accessed on February 8, 2020, <https://www.ddayohio.us/safety-regs.html>.

children attend the event, as well as having to manage overcrowding, the event organizers provide numerous physical barriers to keep visitors safe on the bluff and beach viewing grounds. The rigorous safety precautions of the event are established by the organizers of the event and Conneaut State Park. Loudspeakers are used to direct visitors where to go to watch the events, as well as volunteers directing people behind the physical barriers.



Figure 14. Visitors watching the reenactment of the Normandy Invasion as the Allied reenactors make their way up the hill. Note the large, dense crowd.

Source: Glenn, August 17, 2019.

Questions of Historic Representation

The reenactors at D-Day Conneaut portray, as accurately as circumstances allow, the activities of the military unit they are part of to educate the visitors about the changing technology, weapons, and uniforms from World War II. To adhere to the reenactment guidelines, they must accurately illustrate the uniforms that would have been worn during a specific year, season, or branch of the military. Most of the men's uniforms are quality reproductions since many of the reenactors do not want their originals, those that were purchased or were handed down to them by a family member, to get damaged or faded during the outdoor event. Research is conducted to ensure the reproductions are as authentic as possible. World War II reenactors have the advantage of researching authentic visual resources from the war, including videos and photographs, to make their appearance as accurate as possible. Compared to reenactors who portray soldiers of earlier times and do not have the luxury of using photographs, having the correct details in their uniforms and equipment is essential for a sizeable D-Day event.

For a genuinely accurate D-Day reenactment to occur, both the Allied and German powers need to be present. At D-Day Conneaut, there is a German camp with dedicated men and women reenactors who are available to answer questions and to show the visitors their collection of uniforms, weapons, or artifacts (Figure 25 in Appendix 4). Many of these reenactors seek to teach people of all ages what the German powers were up against. For example, The 9th Reenactment Society, formed in 1992, focuses on the restoration of German military vehicles. Group members share their knowledge about the production of German vehicles during World War II and how restoration efforts can keep these vehicles working. Their reenactment society has drawn many history enthusiasts who also have a passion for mechanics. Much like other reenactment groups, whether from the Allied or German forces, The 9th Reenactment Society's

mission states, in part, “We strive to put forward the most realistic impression we can and to keep the memory of World War II alive.”⁷¹ D-Day Conneaut strives to make the event as enjoyable and accurate as possible by ensuring that the representation of German forces stays true to history.

Veterans at D-Day Conneaut

D-Day Conneaut has the opportunity to have veterans present at their event, unlike Old Fort Niagara’s reenactments. According to the National World War II Museum, as of September 2019, there were less than 390,000 World War II veterans alive. Sadly, as the loss of these veterans is inevitable, and the opportunities for public appearances to hear their stories about their days in the military are limited.⁷²

D-Day Conneaut has hosted reunions for veterans, usually meeting once a year in August (Figure 15). The summer heat can be a challenge for the elderly, especially as many veterans insist on standing during particularly meaningful moments. In 2016, the 65th and 71st Infantry Divisions chose D-Day Conneaut as their reunion location, and in 2018, 165 World War II veterans attended the event, as well as 90 Korean War veterans.

Veterans are given priority at D-Day Conneaut event and demonstrates how important these men and women are to both the history of the United States and the world by offering the veterans a moment on stage to share their military experience with the visitors. Visitors can hear the heartfelt stories from the men that have witnessed the war and then see their stories played

⁷¹ The 9th Reenactment Society, “What We Do,” Accessed on February 9, 2020, <https://www.9thrs.org/what-we-do>.

⁷² The National World War II Museum, “WWII Veteran Statistics, The Passing of the World War II Generation,” Accessed on February 8, 2020, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/wwii-veteran-statistics>.

out by the reenactors during the event. Although it is advantageous for the event organizers and reenactors to talk with veterans who fought in World War II, some veterans feel reenactments are not a respectful way to portray what they went through.



Figure 15. Photo collage of World War II Veterans who attended D-Day Conneaut in years past.

Source: Glenn, August 17, 2019.

There are many shortcomings when museums and military-themed living history organizations try to portray how these veterans fought. It is clearly understood that they are merely a surrogate for the danger and struggle that the veterans actually experienced. No matter how hard the D-Day Conneaut event tries, it cannot accurately represent the real danger the veterans lived through. This can be a difficult situation for the organizers of military-themed living history events to navigate. They must perform an accurate yet entertaining reenactment

while maintaining respect for the veterans present at the event. Overall, at D-Day Conneaut, veterans, fallen soldiers, and the women who helped with the war effort are honored.

Discussion

The D-Day Conneaut event has a fairly effective educational output. The large reenactments that include boats, planes, tanks, and machine guns draws over a thousand participants eager to learn about D-Day (Figure 24 in Appendix 4). The reenactment itself is visually appealing but must be shortened compared to the length of the actual event. Conneaut Beach is strikingly similar to Omaha Beach, albeit on a smaller scale, and successfully imitates a landing area as authentically as possible. Although the event site does not have the same restrictions as a historic site would have, it does have constraints enforced by Ashtabula County. Yet, the event has grown far too large for the given space, and the overcrowding leads to difficulty getting from one place to another. Additionally, as large events tend to be loud, the 1940s style loudspeaker used for the interpretation of the Normandy Invasion reenactment, can be difficult to hear due to limited speakers and crowd size. D-Day Conneaut is only a three-day event that is specific to the Normandy Invasion, and the event expands heavily upon everything that has to do with D-Day, causing the event to be very similar year after year. The advantage of only having one event is that the administration has the entire year to plan for the next year's reenactment. D-Day Conneaut has many elements that work as being interpretive tools, yet the large nature of the event sometimes undercuts its educational purpose.

Concluding Remarks on Both Case Studies

While visual aspects and multisensory experiences are provided at both sites, the ‘stepping back in time’ sense of curiosity that reenactments provide is one of the main reasons why visitors continue to attend them. At Fort Niagara, visitors can physically step into the French Castle where French, British, and American soldiers lived and fought, while, on the grounds of D-Day Conneaut, visitors cannot have that same tangible experience. Even though not everything is authentic, the living history components and engaging battle reenactments at both sites is a definite draw. Fort Niagara has effective visual and sound effects with their use of cannons, mortars, and guns, but nothing on the scale that is seen at D-Day Conneaut with planes, machine guns, and tanks, which help to create a much larger and louder sensory experience. However, while people can attend reenactments and other living history events year-round at Fort Niagara, D-Day Conneaut hosts only one three-day event once a year.

Reenactors at both sites provide a level of expertise about their respective historic events. For adults and children alike, the educational experience is heightened by well versed, enthusiastic men and women who share their knowledge in an exciting environment. Most people can agree that learning about the D-Day landings from a passionate reenactor who has researched and participated in reenactments is more interesting than reading about it in a textbook. Both sites have a robust interpretive plan that highlights the extensive research completed to ensure an accurate portrayal. Yet, including reenactors could lead to a deviation from the guidelines and impact the authenticity of the event. Although this is not guaranteed, it is a factor that the historic sites need to consider and be willing to risk.

Reenactments are an important attraction for visitors, and in many cases, are very lucrative for the host organization. Fort Niagara charges admission to their events and depends

on large turnouts to support their yearly budget. In contrast, D-Day Conneaut is a free event to attend and relies on people to buy food, souvenirs, or experiences, such as the C-47 plane rides. Both sites have effective reenactments, however, the interpretive staff at Fort Niagara help elevate the educational information available to visitors and is less commercialized than D-Day Conneaut. People may agree that D-Day Conneaut has a more exciting reenactment because of the more modern technology compared to Fort Niagara, a larger battleground, and more activities to choose from. At D-Day Conneaut visitors can look to the air, water, or land to view the reenactment, whereas Fort Niagara has only land reenactments. Both sites illustrate that military reenactments can be a useful tool in interpreting the history of past events, however, with consideration to all perspectives, Fort Niagara's educational and interpretive programming is more effective compared to D-Day Conneaut's.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Like any approach to relating information about the past to a modern audience, reenactment has both advantages and flaws, and its efficacy as a tool of historic interpretation depends on many factors. These factors include having the workforce, space, and amenities to host an educational and engaging event. Reenactments are a cultural phenomenon that have captivated audiences around the world for centuries. Dedicated participants must adjust to the ever-changing climates of the political and academic worlds that impact their work.

Using Tilden's interpretive guidelines, historic sites that specialize in military reenactments can better prepare and execute their educational goals for their visitors. He explains how interpretation can take many forms for historic sites to utilize, such as plaques, programming, and reenactments. Through his six interpretation principles, historic sites can determine how effective hosting a reenactment can be for the educational purpose of teaching the visitors. Following Tilden's lead, many historians and authors have written about the fundamental principles of interpretation. Historic sites have access to guidelines based on accurate and safe programming in addition to learning from programming at other sites. These resources can be used as building blocks for pre-existing programs that staff would like to expand upon or learn how to adapt existing programming to be more inclusive.

There are a number of crucial factors that historic sites need to consider before organizing a reenactment at their site. First and foremost, historic site staff must determine whether a reenactment is contextually appropriate. If it is, the visitors will be able to experience a unique interpretation of history and leave the site having learned something, hopefully to return in the future. The visitor's expectation should always be top of mind when planning a reenactment.

Visitors typically expect loud weapons, authentic depictions of the armies or nations present, and an educational experience. Having multisensory experiences and visual aspects lead to crowd-pleasing moments, such as the Normandy Invasion reenactment at D-Day Conneaut with planes, boats, tanks, and machine guns. If the site is not appropriate to host a reenactment, but does so anyway, the visitors will not understand its motives and, in turn, leave confused and questioning whether the site is worth returning to.

Additionally, reenactors provide expert knowledge about a time in history that be advantageous to historic sites. Reenactors can be used to elaborate on a time in history specific to the site and contextualize the information through engaging with the visitors and bringing the past to life. For example, The Battlefield at Gettysburg utilizes educational plaques placed around the historic site, while also elevating the provided information with the use of reenactors engaging in artillery demonstrations throughout the year, bringing life to the otherwise static plaques. Reenactments have an exceedingly high potential to be well-rounded educational experiences that include the research that has to be done by reenactors and historic sites. Presenting aspects such as encampments, weapon demonstrations, and women's life and homelife from a certain period of time can give visitors more diverse perspectives of what happened during wars and general military life.

From the business perspective, attractions, such as reenactments, are a lucrative event for historic sites. Some historic sites rely on good turnouts for reenactments to fulfil part of their yearly budgets, such as at Old Fort Niagara. The weather is also a crucial determining factor for visitor turnout as most visitors will opt out of attending an outdoor event in poor weather.

Guidelines are also necessary for the authenticity aspects of reenactments, as well as the standardized safety protocols. This means that there must be appropriate barriers to keep visitors

in a safe, designated viewing area, blanks fired from weapons, and a choreographed script for how the reenactment will play out. The historic site needs to have people who are adequately trained to create and execute such guidelines. If guidelines are not known or implemented, then problems can arise.

However, there are some issues and drawbacks that need to be considered if a historic site is going to organize and host a reenactment. Staff must be willing to relinquish some control when partnering with external reenactment groups as they may not be fully versed in the site's history or may be unaware of the site's safety protocols. The majority of reenactors conduct and share accurate research and follow the site's interpretive message, however, some reenactors can spread inaccurate information that can leave visitors questioning the integrity of the historic site and run the risk of not being invited back. This is not to say that there is incorrect information given to visitors every time there is a reenactment, but it can be a possibility. The event staff and the organizers of the reenactment units have to hold their own staff and volunteers accountable for their actions.

Authenticity and inclusiveness are ultimately the judgment calls that the historic site needs to make. Historic sites, such as Old Fort Niagara, welcome diversity within the reenacting world for their programming, as do many other sites, even if it might not be entirely true to history. Some people view reenactments as controversial and criticize the elements, such as the hazards of real weapons and the representation of the enemy force, although these elements are necessary to organize a reenactment. These are questions that sites need to consider in their efforts to make reenactments effective interpretive tools: Can different genders and races reenact as other genders or races? Does the site limit participation or can there be some adaptations to include everybody who wishes to participate? Will the historic site turn reenactors away in order

to approach greater authenticity and sacrifice being a truly as an inclusive environment? Will having soldiers in wheelchairs or having an airborne soldier that is overweight lead the visitors to question the appropriateness of the event? These are among the many questions that historic sites need to seriously consider.

The allure of recreating history will not subside for many people, which begs the questions: As new wars are fought, how will reenactments evolve? What wars will be reenacted for the first time? Among the most popular wars to reenact today are the United States Civil War, World War I, and World War II, perhaps since they are viewed to be in a past that is becoming more distant every day or because many people have personal stories tied to these wars. Some people view the more recent wars, such as the Vietnam war, and those that have occurred in the Middle East, such as the Gulf War and Iraq War, as well as wars that are still occurring, such as the War in Afghanistan, as unpopular and criticize the motivations of why they were and are fought. This leads to the question of whether these wars should be reenacted, when is it appropriate to do so, and what types of interpretive methods should be used to educate visitors about them.

Historians and visitors also need to consider if the term “reenactment” is the most accurate way to describe a recreation of a military event. Since many of these events are not completely authentic, should historic sites label them as something else? The purest forms of reenactments took place during the Ancient Roman times, with no elements that could be used today with regard to safety and educational requirements at historic sites. The terms “tactical demonstrations,” “artillery demonstrations,” and “military living history encampments” are used to describe what takes place at these events since the participants are not precisely reenacting

history as it happened. The rhetoric to describe these types of events could change in the future while keeping in mind their efficacy as a tool of historic interpretation.

Overall, reenactments are an effective way to teach visitors about aspects of events related to wars in history, if done correctly. To do so, historic sites need to consider whether having a reenactment is contextually appropriate, take account of the authenticity and inclusivity issues that might arise, and whether they are willing to create and commit to applicable guidelines and procedures.

Reenactments are a popular attraction for people who visit historic sites. There is a sense of curiosity and a draw to what reenactors do that entices people to visit. The tangible elements and multisensory experiences, as well as the expert knowledge that reenactors provide, allow visitors to witness something truly unique and cannot be experienced anywhere else.

There are video games, movies, historic documentaries, and television shows that depict wars very accurately, but people cannot hear, see, smell, and touch material culture through a screen. Reenactments allow visitors to connect with history differently and typically leave a lasting impression on them. They are a multisensory way to learn about past events and spark a sense of curiosity within visitors about how people lived and fought in the past. If done well, reenactments can be a highly effective interpretive tool that historic sites can use to provide visitors with more unique experiences.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Prominent Eras of Reenactments Portrayed

- Ancient Reenactment (mostly Roman (8th century BCE-476 CE) and Greek (12th century BCE-600 CE)
- Dark Ages / Medieval Reenactment (476 CE-1453 CE)
- Jousting Tournaments from the Middle Ages (1200 CE- 1600 CE)
- Renaissance Reenactments and Fairs (1300 CE-1600 CE)
- The Fur Trade, also known as “rendezvous” (16th century)
- The English Civil War Reenactment (1642 CE- 1651 CE)
- The French and Indian War Reenactment (1754 CE- 1763 CE)
- The American Revolutionary War Reenactment (1775 CE-1783 CE)
- Napoleonic Reenactment (1803 CE-1815 CE)
- War of 1812 Reenactment (1812 CE- 1815 CE)
- Victorian Era (1837 CE- 1901 CE)
- Mexican- American War Reenactment (1846 CE- 1848 CE)
- The Crimean War Reenactment (1853 CE- 1856 CE)
- American Civil War Reenactment (1861 CE- 1865 CE)
- Wild West themes in the United States (1865 CE- 1895 CE)
- The Franco-Prussian War Reenactment (1870 CE- 1871 CE)
- World War I Reenactment (1914 CE- 1918 CE)
- World War II Reenactment (1939 CE- 1945 CE)
- Korean War Reenactment (1950 CE- 1953 CE)
- Vietnam War Reenactment (1955 CE- 1975 CE)

Appendix 2

Authenticity Standards that Old Fort Niagara provides for the reenactment groups that are invited to participate.

Authenticity Standards for Old Fort Niagara's French and Indian War Encampment.⁷³

Part I: Universal Standards

The following standards have been compiled in order to present a more accurate educational program to Old Fort Niagara's visitors. At its core, the purpose of this event is to further OFNs educational mission, and thus certain non-historic things will need to be kept out of sight. The following rules and standards will apply to all registered event participants old enough to take the field with a musket. (16+) **These are not meant to exclude anyone, but rather to encourage them to bring more appropriate things to the event, while leaving less appropriate things at home.** As a general rule of thumb, if something looks like it belongs at a Pirate festival, steampunk con, or fantasy LARP, it is probably not appropriate for this event. **If you have a piece of evidence to suggest that something we say is unacceptable can be documented to your impression, we are happy to amend these standards if provided evidence.** The standards for each impression have items listed as "Best, Better, Acceptable, Discouraged, and Unacceptable." In many cases items are listed as "Best" over other things because they are best for this siege specifically. We like a good impression, even if it's not siege specific, but we really appreciate those who take the time to tailor their impressions to the siege.

Best: This means that this piece of kit is excellent for your impression.

Better: This piece of kit may not be a museum quality reproduction, but it's still quite good.

Acceptable: Exactly what it sounds like. These are items that won't get much attention one way or the other.

Discouraged: These are things that fort staff would really prefer you didn't bring, however they will still be allowed on the field.

Unacceptable: These are things that will not be allowed on the field or in front of the public in the camps. If OFN staff see these things, they will ask you to put them away. Refusal to do so can result in ejection from the site, and being disinvited from future events.

The following are things that are universally unacceptable regardless of impression.

⁷³ Old Fort Niagara, "Reenactor Information," Accessed on January 6, 2020.
<https://www.oldfortniagara.org/information-for-reenactor>.

1. Fairy/elf/fantasy/science fiction makeup.
2. Pirate costume pieces.
3. Steampunk regalia.
4. Live ammunition.
5. Filled powder horns.
6. Modern food or beverage containers in the open.
7. Modern bedding in the open.
8. Modern tobacco products in front of the public.

Facial hair is discouraged, especially on those portraying soldiers. Even on civilians the case for beards is tenuous at best, but on soldiers it is simply incorrect. We would encourage event participants to appear clean shaven. We would also ask that camp equipment be kept as sparse as you can manage. Neither of these armies had the luxury of a very robust supply chain.

Appendix 3

Photographs of Reenactments and Encampments from Old Fort Niagara.



Figure 16. French and Indian War encampment at Old Fort Niagara.
Source: Glenn, June 30, 2018.



Figure 17. French and Indian War reenactment at Old Fort Niagara.
Source: Glenn, June 30, 2018



Figure 18. Weapon demonstration at the French and Indian War encampment at Old Fort Niagara.

Source: Glenn, June 30, 2018.



Figure 19. War of 1812 Reenactment event in 2018 at Old Fort Niagara, illustrating the geography of the grounds and where the visitors get to view the reenactment.

Source: Old Fort Niagara Association.

Appendix 4

Photographs of Reenactments and Encampments from D-Day Conneaut.



Figure 20. View of Ashtabula County, Ohio and rainstorm from a C-47 plane that was part of the D-Day Conneaut events.

Source: Glenn, August 17, 2019.



Figure 21. Part of the British Commonwealth encampment at D-Day Conneaut.

Source: Glenn, August 17, 2019.



Figure 22. Allied Home Front Sign at D-Day Conneaut.

Source: Glenn, August 17, 2019.



Figure 23. Allied Home Front encampment at D-Day Conneaut.

Source: Glenn, August 17, 2019.



Figure 24. Tank demonstration on Conneaut County Park beach at D-Day Conneaut.

Source: Glenn, August 17, 2019.



Figure 25. Reenactors portraying German troops marching to their position during the reenactment of the Normandy invasion at D-Day Conneaut.

Source: Glenn, August 17, 2019.