

So you want to be a Reenactor?

By P.J. Miller

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If you are interested in history and you like camping, reenacting, also called living history, may just be a hobby for you! As reenactors we do research independently and collaboratively in order to educate the broader community about our shared past in a tangible and exciting way. Reenacting attracts people of all backgrounds and participation at all levels and abilities is encouraged.

Generally in the U.S., military reenacting is the most popular, with a plethora of mock battles and military engagements all over the Northeastern U.S. and Canada. However at these events there are many people who portray civilian life as well as historical skills outside the sphere of military life. One's commitment to historical authenticity is generally determined by their reenacting group. As reenactors must have special insurance to do such events most reenactors are part of a group and most groups democratically set standards for authenticity in practices, demonstrations, and material culture. These groups consist of likeminded people with the shared goals of uncovering and recreating history.

Re-enactment groups are a rich resource where everyone shares information and ideas. You can learn historical skills from how to safely fire a musket, to cooking, spinning, weaving, woodworking, bush craft, almost anything people in the past did is fair game to recreate today! Generally reenactors camp in the same style canvas tents used in the 19th century. Many, if not most, of course, use modern items for safety and comfort such as coolers and air mattresses hidden away to maintain the historical look. One is not expected to maintain complete historical accuracy in a camp all day and night, and eventually the camp will close to the public. This allows reenactors to congregate together and enjoy the social aspects of the hobby.

If you are interested in becoming a Reenactor the best thing to do is attend an event and talk to the participants. During this time of quarantine the next best thing is to contact a local

group on social media or by email. See if the portrayal of the group aligns with your own historical interests and see if you connect with its members. Many will be glad to lend you a hand as you acquire skills and accoutrements and many groups have gear to lend out to new members.

At its core a reenacting is about educating the public about our shared history and having fun!

My own reenacting group is Forsyth's Rifles Inc. we portray time periods from the French and Indian War through the War of 1812. Our War of 1812 persona is the 1st United States Rifle Regiment, Benjamin Forsyth's Company who were present during the Battle of Plattsburgh. Please find our Facebook group Forsyth's Rifles Inc. for more information. I can be reached personally at pauljmillier1800@gmail.com.

I have been involved in Living History practically since birth. My family got involved in the 1960's for the United States Bicentennial of the American War for Independence. Called "The Miller Family Colonial Museum" we would travel to local schools doing a historical display and first person interpretation. As I got to be 14, the age one can join a cannon crew, we decided to jump into military reenacting and found a wonderful group of people in Forsyth's Rifles Inc. One of the best things about reenacting is that it is a hobby for the whole family! I got more and more involved, "working my way through the ranks" and now, I have the honor and responsibility of organizing an entire battle reenactment and of portraying an officer in the army.



The author photographed with his lovely wife.