

Michigan Historical Museum kicks off Civil War exhibit with re-enactment

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Written by

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As men in blue woolen uniforms conducted drills in an adjacent empty lot, with sounds of their replica Springfield and Enfield rifles cracking out over Kalamazoo Street, Heather Jarrett sat under the awning of a canvas tent and crimped the crust of a cherry pie.

It wasn't the martial displays and the smell of gunpowder that drew the Jackson 16-year-old to Civil War re-enacting.

It was the dresses, though she observed that, wearing a broad skirt around an open flame, "You have to watch where you swish."

On Saturday, a grassy lot west of the Michigan Historical Museum in Lansing became a rough approximation of a Civil War camp, a patch of re-created and re-imagined history, complete with a cannon, an Abraham Lincoln impersonator and

biscuits baking over open coals.

The occasion marked an anniversary. One-hundred-fifty years and three days before, shots fired on Fort Sumter began the Civil War.

It also marked the opening of a exhibit at the museum called "Plowshares into Swords," exploring how the war changed the lives of Michigan's people.

Michigan, of course, was the home front, a state that sent some 90,000 men to fight, but saw no battles on its own soil.

And so the exhibit focuses less on battles than it does on "how people in Michigan dealt with the war, how they got through it, how they learned about it at first," said Eric Perkins, an education historian at the museum.

That was a subject, too, for some of the re-enactors, and one laden with no small amount of nostalgia.



"I would love to go back to that kind of lifestyle," said Lorrie Roland, of Lansing, who was cutting biscuit dough as her husband, Anson, tended the cast iron pots and Dutch ovens sitting over a nearby fire pit.

"It's more peaceful. It's calm," she said, "and your family, everyone was together. Nowadays everyone is on the run."

Dave Downing has been a Civil War re-enactor for 18 years, 14 years longer than the war itself.

"Everybody gets into this for a different thing," he said. "Some people like the history aspect of it, some people like the Civil War itself, some people have ancestors."

The Mason man, who like many at Saturday's event is part of the 7th Michigan Volunteer Infantry, Company B, falls into the last category.

He is related to Walter L. Mundell, a Union soldier who was shot three times, captured, exchanged and who ultimately won the Congressional Medal of Honor for capturing a Confederate battle flag at the Sailors Creek, Va., in April of 1865.

He recalls his first reenactment, standing in the ranks of latter day Union forces, watching Confederate re-enactors lowering their rifles, thinking "I'm supposed to stand here?"

It's given him an entirely different sense of what his ancestor must have gone through,

he said.

"Once you put the wool uniform on and do all this stuff, you'll never read a history book the same way again," he said.



A crowd gathers to watch Civil War re-enactors begin infantry drills Saturday as part of the Plowshares to Swords event sponsored by the Michigan Historical Museum. / Rod Sanford/Lansing State Journal

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**Civil War Sesquicentennial Opening - Outside Program, Lansing, Michigan
April 16, 2011
Photographs from Robinson's Battery**

Robinson's Battery had the honor to participate in the State of Michigan's official opening of the five year celebration of the Civil War's Sesquicentennial. Fred, Silas and John drove up to Lansing on Friday afternoon, arriving at the site around 2:45 PM. They found Capt. Emmerick and was directed to the campsite where the camp equipment and tentage was off loaded from the trailer. The gun was positioned near by for the night. Pvt.'s Mark and Dave joined in the setting of camp. A typical April weather front moved in and a light rain & wind began, which lasted through the following day.



The cool temperature of the mid 40 degrees made the Greatcoats Great!



The Merrimack stove worked good for making a supper of Fricasseed pork steaks, Garlic smashed potatoes and a tasty treat of Hominy, complimented with fresh baked biscuits & Frog jam. The evening was spent talking with each other & old friends from the other reenactment companies who were there.

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However, the wind & cool temps caused most of the men to retire early to the comfort of the inside of their tents & bedrolls. At 6 AM on Sat. John Was up and got the Merrimack stove fired up and soon the rest of the men emerged from their tents and volunteers to sit close to the stove & cook were readily employed.



Camp kettle of root vegetables & ham hocks were started heating for the Boiled dinner that would be ready for Lunch. Pvt Phil arrived to fill out our detachment.

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The men marched out to the gun and fired the first shot of the event at 9 AM. and then held several firing demonstrations through out the day



The Infantry alternated with marching & firing demonstrations so that there was something happening almost every hour thru the day.

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Dave found time to play the Fife as part of the program.



There were several speeches made by President Lincoln, Gov. Austin Blair and other notables. The 5th Michigan Band played a concert for the troops. Battery Members Erik & Kris Lindquist and Deb Gosselin stopped by to see the camp, As did old friends Bruce & Sally Linton, it was really good to see these people again.

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More firing demonstrations by our cannoneers.



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The crowd seemed to appreciate our demonstrations



At Retreat, Robinson's Battery fired the salute as the flag was lowered and the event ended. Then came the fun of breaking camp in the rain & loading wet canvass for the trip home.



In spite of the weather, Robinson's Battery's men were glad that they had represented the artillerymen of Michigan who enlisted in 1861 in response to President Lincoln's call to arms.