

# Civil War Living History Weekend Tremendously Successful

By Mike Barhorst

Sidney, Ohio's inaugural *Civil War Living History Weekend* was a tremendous success! With the exception of the rain that dampened the enthusiasm of the crowd on Saturday, the weekend's activities couldn't have gone better!

Much of the success of the weekend can be attributed to two factors: 1) a dedicated planning committee who worked tirelessly for more than a year; and, 2) a cadre of volunteers from the Shelby County Historical Society who had experience working large events. Even for those things that had not been pre-planned, the Historical Society's volunteers instinctively knew what needed to be done and went about doing it.

Most of the large Civil War events have taken place far away from Sidney. As a result, talent recruited for the planning committee was 'imported' to assist us in planning. We were truly blessed to have individuals with a wealth of knowledge willing to travel to Sidney the first Saturday of each month for several months to engage in the planning process.

The committee included J.R. Sharp, whose Confederate 1<sup>st</sup> Tennessee Infantry Regiment spent a weekend at Camp Brookside early in 2015. Edd Sharp, J.R.'s father, organized the modern 1<sup>st</sup> Tennessee in 1992. As a result, J.R. has been reenacting for years, and has a wealth of knowledge he has accumulated through participating in a host of events, large and small. In real life, J.R. lives in the Dayton area and helps maintain the computer system for the Kettering Health Network.

The committee also included Doug Slagel. Doug is a native of Sidney and has also been reenacting for many years. He has participated in many of the large events in the east, and annually attends Remembrance Weekend in Gettysburg. In addition to Civil War reenacting, Doug is also a World War II reenactor, and almost every year spends a cold weekend at Fort Indian Town Gap, Pennsylvania reenacting the Battle of the Bulge. Although Doug and his wife reside in Tipp City, Sidney is still home. Because he has boundless energy, enthusiasm and experience (not to mention he is one of my former students), Doug was recruited early in the planning process. In real life, Doug is a heavy equipment operator and works for Belgray Construction.

Elizabeth Topping was recruited for the planning committee because of her extensive background in coordinating civilian encampments for period Civil War events. Elizabeth has volunteered at Ohio History Connection as a costumed interpreter both in the museum and in Ohio Village performing 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person scenarios for the public. Elizabeth has extensive experience, having participated in Civil War events near and far. Elizabeth helped recruit speakers for the event and recruited all the sutlers. Elizabeth resides in the Columbus area and in real life, is a graphic designer.

Tilda Phlipot was recruited initially because of the need for a 501(c)(3) non-profit through which to channel the monies necessary to fund the event. Teaming with the Shelby County Historical Society was fortuitous – a true blessing. Tilda has likely had more experience than anyone else locally in planning and executing events, and her expertise paid dividends. In addition, "her" army of volunteers made all the difference in the execution of the weekend's events.

Sidney's Parks and Recreation Director Duane Gaier was an essential member of the committee. Duane has served in his current capacity since 2008, and has teamed the Parks and Recreation Department with organizations in planning community events in the past, including the Mayfest Soccer Tournament. He has previously assisted the Shelby County Historical Society (i.e., the Field of Flags and the Viet Nam Traveling Wall). This was, however, the first large-scale event that has been planned for Tawawa Park. His participation in planning this event was essential to the success of the weekend.

Events such as Sidney, Ohio's Civil War Living History Weekend are labor intensive. The lack of volunteers is why so many similar events eventually become part of a community's history. I certainly want to offer special thanks to the many volunteers who answered Tilda's call. Including those who

stitched the pokes, those who prepared the rations, those who staffed the park's gate during the event and so many others, we estimate the number of volunteer hours to exceed 1,287!

Of course, the event would not have been possible without the generous support of the City of Sidney. Although there were contributions from individuals, businesses and industry, a Lodging Tax grant provided initial funding. In addition, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the Police Department, Shelby Public Transit and Parks and Recreation all played vital roles before, during and after the event concluded.

A debt of gratitude is also owed Sidney City Schools. The district provided busses which were used to transport visitors to and from the parking lots to the park.

Even an item as critical to reenactments as firewood didn't present a problem. Through the winter, the Parks Department removed a number of Ash trees. Doug Slagel and his father Paul spent a number of days at the park cutting and splitting firewood – just one example.

The Trustees of the Monumental Building not only contributed monetarily to the weekend's activities, but opened their historic building. As a result, visitors had the opportunity to see the memorial tablets on which the names of those Shelby Countians who gave their lives during the Civil War are carved.

It's impossible to mention everyone who played a critical role in the success of the event. I would, however, be remiss if I did not thank Mark Henman of Tactical Solutions for his assistance with obtaining and distributing the gunpowder that was provided to the reenactors.

Equally critical was the role that Roger Lentz played in providing water for the reenactors as well as rations. He knew where he would obtain pork belly, have corn ground into cornmeal and a host of other things that were once common but are no longer readily found at the local market.

It goes without saying that the event would not have been possible without the support of the reenacting community. Renactors representing nine different states participated in the inaugural event. From the Confederate and Union troops to the civilians to those providing historical character portrayals in the education tent - all were willing to contribute in order to help bring history alive.

Members of the planning committee received a great deal of positive feedback during the course of the weekend. One of the most repeated compliments regarding the park itself. As one reenactor stated, "This is not a city park, it is a forest preserve."

Initially, it was the hope that the reenactment would prove beneficial to the community in a host of ways. According to TourismOhio, the average day tripper spends \$112 per person; the average overnight guest spends \$341. Finding ways to attract more people to experience Sidney, Ohio was just one of the goals of the weekend.

The planning committee will soon be meeting to review this year's event, and to begin planning for the 2018 event. The biennial event will next be held the third weekend in September (September 15-16, 2018). We hope that Sidney, Ohio's Civil War Living History Weekend will continue to grow in popularity and promote Sidney and Shelby County as a great place to live, work or visit.