

FRENCH & INDIAN WAR

250th Anniversary

COMMEMORATION COMMISSION

REENACTING FOR BEGINNERS: A HOW-TO GUIDE

By Heather E. Schwartz

Have you ever walked through a historic site and wished you could step back in time? As a historic reenactor of the French and Indian War, that's exactly what you get to do: dress in period costume; learn a traditional craft or trade; use old-fashioned equipment and weaponry; assume the character of a French, British or American Indian soldier or civilian. You can recreate the past—it all starts with visiting events and sites focused on the history you enjoy most.

All along the Seaway Trail, throughout New York State and extending into Pennsylvania, the French and Indian War 250th Anniversary Commemoration Commission has planned events through 2010, including battle reenactments that mirror the originals between 1754 and 1763. Schedule your trip to coincide



Doug Cubbison, Command Historian
10th Mountain Division, photo by Kent Bolke

with these events—or visit anytime to learn more about the French and Indian War—and you'll be on your way to joining the living history community.

Step 1: Make friends

What's the easiest way to get started reenacting? Approach some of the reenactors you see at an event. It's not as difficult as it may sound—and now's your chance to learn more about the history of the French and Indian War, the type of red paint American Indian reenactors use, and the possibility of joining a unit to get involved yourself.

"Reenactors are very willing to share information," says Paul Lear, historic site manager at Fort Ontario, in Oswego, NY, who reenacts the French and Indian War as a British soldier. "Most units are willing to loan uniforms and equipment to people for the first year. It's a real team effort. Everyone helps you along."

Borrowing clothing and other accoutrements is definitely advised as you get started. Purchasing items can get expensive; uniforms, for example, are tailor-made using authentic fabrics and stitching methods. Many reenactors have friends make their clothing, or they use a company that creates historical reproductions, like The Discriminating General, in Ontario, Canada.



Jim & Marsha Hough, renewing marriage vows
with Abbe Francois portrayed by David Murray,
photo by Bob Downey

Of course, if you're good with a sewing machine yourself, that's another way to get started. Marsha Hough portrays a cook, though she sometimes finds herself manning a cannon when the unit is short on men. She needs two sets of clothing: one for reenacting the French and Indian War and the other for reenacting the War of 1812. She makes it all herself for events at several sites, including Fort La Présentation, in Ogdensburg, NY, and Fort Ticonderoga, in Ticonderoga, NY. "It's much easier and more cost effective," she explains.

Michael Whittaker, a Canadian government worker, also reenacts the French and Indian War reenactments at Fort La Présentation, portraying a French Navy lieutenant. "One doesn't jump into this," he notes. "You have to build into it."

When he started reenacting, Whittaker could fit all of his clothes, utensils and blankets in a duffel bag; years



Paul Lear; Fort Ontario Site Manager (left) and George Bray, photo by Randy Patten

SIGNATURE EVENT

Want to see reenactors in action? Each year through 2010, the French and Indian War 250th Anniversary Commemoration series includes a signature event; this year, Fort Ticonderoga will host a two-week Grand Encampment of the French and Indian War June 24 through July 8. Highlights of the event will include a performance by Les Petits Chanteurs Boys Choir from Montreal in the New Mars Education Center as well as a Parade of Arms and skirmish in Ticonderoga Village, battle reenactments, a Day of Scots to commemorate the loss of British troops and French Victory Day. Admission for visitors is \$15 for adults, \$7 for children 7 to 12, and \$13.50 for seniors. Children under 7 are free. About 2,000 reenactors and 20,000 visitors are expected to attend. For more information, call 518-585-2821 or go to www.fort-ticonderoga.org.

later, he had so much stuff—including tents, tables and chairs—he used an extended van and trailer to cart it around. Since he wears glasses in real life, he even had a pair of 18th century spectacles made to wear at events.

Step 2: Indulge your interests

Many people find their way into the living history community through a passion for research. Collecting items from the French and Indian War period—or even finding authentic-looking items that aren't quite so expensive—requires plenty of research. What could be more exciting to a history enthusiast who wants to start reenacting the French and Indian War?

George Bray began researching the period as a teenager about 30 years ago. He started with history books, found more titles in the books' bibliographies and went to larger libraries—including the Library of Congress—to obtain those titles. He also collects original period items like documents, prints, newspapers and weaponry by searching antiquarian book sales and, these days, Ebay. In fact, he's become an expert in his own right, writing articles on the French and Indian War for publications including *The Early America Review* and *Muzzle-loader Magazine*.

Bray also serves as commanding officer of Rogers' Rangers, a unit that reenacts the French and Indian War at sites including Fort Ticonderoga, Old Fort Niagara, Fort Ontario, Fort Stanwix, in Rome, NY, and Rogers Island Visitors Center, in Fort Edward. "It's my passion," Bray says. "It's my escape from 21st century life."

According to many reenactors, it's important to know your passion before making a commitment to joining a unit. After all, some units are more "hard-core" about being authentic, while others focus on commemorative aspects, historical programs or

creating a social atmosphere. "A lot of people think all units and organizations are the same, but there are a lot of differences," says Douglas R. Cubbison, Command Historian, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), U.S. Army, who belongs to two French and Indian War units, one British, one French. "That makes a huge difference in your experience."

Some people like to go camping in the primitive style—eating only what the soldiers ate back in the day. For Marsha Hough, the enjoyment

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Sir Bob Emerson, photo by Randy Patten

FRENCH & INDIAN WAR 2008 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

250th Anniversary

April 26-27 • War College of the Seven Year's War: Series of lectures and demonstrations on military history of the period. Pre-registration required. Fort Ticonderoga, Ticonderoga, NY. 518-585-2821; www.fort-ticonderoga.org

April 27 • 250th Anniversary of the April 30th, 1758 Raid on German Flatts: 11:00 am church with light refreshments following the service. Fort Herkimer Church, German Flatts, NY. 315-699-2072

May 3 • French & Indian War British Reenactor Training: British reenactors will drill and train their troops on the commands for the military Manual of Arms, learning the commands for executing evolutions as British troops during the French & Indian War. Rogers Island Visitors Center, Fort Edward, NY. 518-747-3693; www.rogersisland.org

May 24-25 • Native American Living-History Weekend: Join Native American reenactors to learn more about this area's first inhabitants — how they lived, what they ate and how they adjusted to the coming of the Europeans. Rogers Island Visitors Center, Fort Edward, NY. 518-747-3693; www.rogersisland.org

May 24-25 • 250th Anniversary Encampment: Commemorate the anniversary of the construction of Fort Stanwix during the French and Indian War. Fort Stanwix National Monument 315-338-7730; www.nps.gov/fost

June 7-8 • 18th Century Market Fair: An event that carries on the tradition of fairs and markets, set by Sir William Johnson. Johnson Hall State Historic Site, Johnstown, NY. 518-762-8712; www.friendsofjohnsonhall.org

June 24-July 8 • Grand Encampment of the French & Indian War: Reenactors depicting French, Canadian, British, Provincial, and Native American forces come together in this once-in-a-lifetime recreation of the Battle of Carillon. Battle reenactments at Fort Ticonderoga the 28th and 29th; a Day of Scots, July 5th, to commemorate the loss of British troops and French Victory Day on July 8th. Fort Ticonderoga, Ticonderoga, NY. 518-585-2821; www.fort-ticonderoga.org

July 4-6 • French & Indian War Encampment: Living history demonstrators recreate the 1759 Siege of Niagara. Large living history camps, and more. Old Fort Niagara Historic Site, Youngstown, NY. 716-745-7611; www.oldfortniagara.org

July 7 – August 15 • Archaeological Field School: Lectures for Adirondack Community College's Archaeological Field School open for the public. Visit with the diggers and enjoy lunchtime talks on various historical and archaeological topics. 12:30 pm daily. Rogers Island Visitors Center, Fort Edward, NY. 518-747-3693; www.rogersisland.org

July 8 • 250th Anniversary of the Battle of Carillon Commemoration: Procession and wreath-laying ceremony led by the Fort Ticonderoga Fife & Drum. Fort Ticonderoga, Ticonderoga, NY. 518-585-2821; www.fort-ticonderoga.org

July 12 & August 23 • 1758-Focus on Fort Carillon bike trip: This 35-mile trip provides a reflective experience for the time traveler as he or she visits the period when this bicycle path was used as a road to transport military troops and supplies from Fort Edward to Lake George, NY. Registration deadline is June 12. American Heritage Bicycle Tours. 518-373-0988; www.americanheritagebicycletours.com

July 12 • 250th Commemoration of the deaths of Lord Howe and Major Duncan Campbell and the defeat of Abercromby's Army: Join with reenactors to remember the ultimate sacrifices given by the defenders of this country. Rogers Island Visitors Center, Fort Edward, NY. 518-747-3693; www.rogersisland.org

July 19-20 • Founder's Day Weekend French & Indian War Re-enactment and Colonial Trade Fair: Take a step back in time to the mid-eighteenth century in the St. Lawrence River Valley. Fort La Présentation Site, Lighthouse Point, Ogdensburg, NY. 315-393-3260, 877-228-7810; www.fortlapresentation.net

August 2-3 • The Great Carrying Place "Coming Home" Pow Wow: Enjoy the sounds of the drums and singers, and the sight of proud, energetic, colorful dancers, as they kick up their heels in their particular style. Two dance sessions each day, and

native vendors with a variety of crafts and gifts. Please bring a chair or blanket. Rogers Island Visitors Center, Fort Edward, NY. 518-747-3693; www.rogersisland.org

August 9-10 • French and Indian War Encampment Weekend: Military camps near the ruins of the French and British forts; tactical weapons demonstrations. Crown Point State Historic Site, Crown Point, NY. 518-597-4666; www.nysparks.com

August 22-24 • French & Indian War Encampment: 18th century drills, living history and tactical weapons demonstrations. Fort Ontario State Historic Site, Oswego, NY. 315-343-4711; www.fortontario.com, www.nysparks.com

September 8-13 • Annual Lake George Area Restaurant Week: Participating restaurants throughout the region will offer three-course meals for \$17.57, in honor of the French & Indian War. Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce. 518-668-5755; www.lakegeorgechamber.com

September 12-13 • Festival of Nations & Birthday Party for the Crown Point Lighthouse, 1858-2008: National heritage presentations, music, crafts, food, dance, games and family activities celebrate the five cultures that permanently impacted Crown Point during the 1700s— Canada, France, Great Britain, Woodland Indian tribes, and the United States. Crown Point State Historic Site, Crown Point, NY. 518-597-4666; www.nysparks.com

September 20-21 • The End of the Campaign French & Indian War Encampment: Reenactors recreate life in a 1758 French & Indian War camp. Enjoy the smells as meals are prepared over open fires and listen to stories of 18th century camp life. Hear the musket fire as work parties are attacked beyond the fort and watch as the British and Provincial soldiers, along with their Native American allies, hurry to their defense. Rogers Island Visitors Center, Fort Edward, NY. 518-747-3693; www.rogersisland.org

Activities are coordinated among many groups and volunteers, therefore, times are approximate. Visitors should check the event Web site or contact the event to confirm the information.

For more information on all events, visit <http://fiw250.iloveny.com/>

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comes from having friends in her unit, which has grown over the past six years to about 40 members. "There's a lot of camaraderie. We've all gotten close," she says. "It's like a big family."

Step 3: Join a unit

Why join a unit? It's essential, since participation in reenactments at historic sites is often by invitation only. As Michael Whittaker explains, the invitation system is a way to control numbers and make sure only proven individuals and units attend. But it's not meant to discourage anyone from participating. It's easy to arrange an invitation by contacting a site.

Once you know what you're looking for in a unit, you can find it—even if there's no group based in your immediate area. Visit a historic site, and see which groups they recommend. "We all maintain lists," says Bob Emerson, executive director at Old Fort Niagara, in Youngstown, NY, who reenacts as a regular French soldier in French and Indian War events. "Some groups may have events in your area even if they're not based there."

Most importantly, make sure to visit French and Indian War events and historic sites along the Seaway Trail. That's where you'll find the living history community in action—and ready to welcome you as a spectator or a participant. ♦

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28-29 Lewiston Gardenfest

JULY

4-6 Old Fort Niagara's French & Indian War Encampment
6-August 10 International Sunday Concerts
12-13 Olde Sanborn Days
25-27 Youngstown Level Regatta

AUGUST

9-10 Lewiston Art Festival
16-17 Sanborn Lewiston Farm Museum Festival
22-24 Historic Lewiston Jazz Festival
31 Youngstown Firemen's Field Days thru Sept 1

SEPTEMBER

5-7 Niagara County Peach Festival
27-28 Harvest Festival and Craft Show
27-28 NY Power Authority Wildlife Festival

OCTOBER

5 Town of Porter Cabbage Festival
10-31 River Region Scarecrow Expo
19 Sanborn Winetique Festival

DECEMBER

6-7 Christmas in the Village and Tour of Homes