

Reliving 1775 at FI National Seashore

Story and Photos
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“Advance!”



Lines of men march across the great lawn at the William Floyd Estate. On command shots are heard and smoke is seen billowing in the wind. Thanks to “living history” the men of the 3rd New York Regiment of Long Island Companies of 1775 are alive to fight again. The re-enactment of the Revolutionary War that took place on Saturday, June 11 made social studies exciting—even for those who used to fall asleep in class. With muskets firing and pitched tents, the historical estate became a portal back in time.

Members of the 3rd Regiment have been participating in re-enactments across the country visiting various national landmarks. The 3rd Regiment was originally formed on June 28, 1775 and was authorized under Colonel James Clinton with an average of 70 men to a company. Today the men of this company strive to recreate the period with as much authenticity as possible.

Gary Vorwald, who first strapped on a gunpowder satchel in 1976 said, “I want the people to see what life was really like then and make it real. We have a tendency to romanticize the era, but it was brutal. It’s also a chance

to dispel common misconceptions.”

Matt Thorenz agreed. As a resident of the area and a re-enactor for five years, he stressed the importance of giving people “a sense of local history and identity.” He wants people to be proud to say that they grew up where William Floyd was born.

Floyd is most famous for being the fourth signer of the Declaration of Independence. However he was also a General in the war, a member of the first United States Congress and a New York State Senator. The Floyd history can unravel before your eyes by touring the estate, which is a part of the Fire Island National Seashore. With rooms impeccably decorated with original furniture and artifacts it’s as if the occupants never left. It is an unforgettable experience to walk through doorways men like Thomas Jefferson once entered as well.

By hosting re-enactments at the estate people are more likely to have their interest piqued. Curator of the William Floyd Estate, Steve Czarniecki, couldn’t be more pleased. “There really is nothing like this,” he said enthusiastically. “The 3rd Regiment is so used to people and they interact so well with them, that we’d love to have them here more often.”

And why wouldn’t he? Walking around in traditional attire the members of the regiment looked right at home on the property. They cheerfully answered questions and each possessed an astounding amount of information. It goes to show that when one finds their passion, the hunger for knowledge becomes a voracious appetite. And the onlookers ate up the regiments’ exhibition.



The weaponry of 1775 was incredibly inaccurate. In order to increase their power, soldiers fought in long lines standing shoulder to shoulder. A smooth bore musket would need to be fired at about 50 yards or closer to actually hit a target, as opposed to the 100 yards that they were often shot at. Therefore, the more people you have shooting in one area, the more likely you are to wound or kill someone. According to Vorwald, “rapid fire” would produce a whopping three rounds per minute. His demonstration made it perfectly clear why it took nearly 20 seconds to load and fire a musket.

This is what re-enactors live for. Through interaction with the public the learning experience becomes hands-on. When people can hear the pop of the muskets and smell the smoke everything becomes real.

After first slapping the satchel to settle the gunpowder, a soldier would then take out a cartridge and rip it open with his teeth. Apparently having two opposing teeth was a necessity to fight in battle just for this reason. A long pole (ramrod) is pushed into the barrel to secure everything. The flint is lighted, trigger pulled and most likely the gun will misfire. After some steps are repeated eventually the gun will go off. But what would happen if you were shot while trying to reload your weapon?



Tom Leonbruno, who took on the role of surgeon, explained some of the gruesome details. The word minimal would be the best to describe the typical medical set up. Two years into the war most of the medicines were already unavailable. Infections were rampant and due to their lack of knowledge, amputation was the popular cure. With no anesthesia an amputee’s only saving grace—besides a whiskey—was a petit screw tourniquet. This device was a strap that could be adjusted by the patient to control blood flow. Imagine not only watching your own amputation, but having a hand in it too?

A lot of people died because of their uneducated ideas. Leonbruno elaborated,

“They would bleed out the bad blood. If you were sick, they made you sweat it out, which would eventually dehydrate and kill you. George Washington was basically bled to death by his doctors after they extracted five to nine pints of his blood.”

That’s a lesser-known fact that I will never forget. In less than two hours I felt as if I learned more than I ever did in high school. The experience was truly an inspiration that prompted further research into the Revolution. During the warm months take a day to relive some local history. The William Floyd Estate is open from Memorial Day weekend to the last weekend in October with tours starting at 11 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. The estate boasts a 25-room house, 12 outbuildings, a cemetery and a new exhibition, “Scribblers and Scrivners” honoring the Floyd family authors through the years.