

Value-Added Events

You've spent months researching and constructing your clothing and personal items. You've toiled over a great historic hairstyle for hours. You've read everything you can get your hands on to be prepared for mid-century life. You get to the event—and spend the weekend shopping three event merchants who all have similar goods, attend one tea party, a fashion show, and endure endless chatting about the Internet.

Sound depressing?

Sound familiar?

All too often, the military has all the “action,” and citizens are left to twiddle thumbs and make sandwiches. With a little planning and a small core group of interested citizens, you can make a change for the better.

These suggestions work best at the sort of event with The Battle of Something Generic enacted at specific times twice a day, tent camping for all participants, a merchant row—“smorgasbord” events with a wide mix of spectators and hobbyists of all shapes and sizes.

Many ideas require pre-event planning and advertising; don't rely on event word-of-mouth alone to draw hobbyists into these “value added” activities. Use email, phone, and mail lists effectively to spread the word before the event. Work with organizers to have details listed on any event website. Designate contact people for various scenarios, and communicate with them.

Work closely with event organizers; many times, the military end of the hobby truly doesn't understand the citizen side of things. They may not be aware of a need for more and different activities, and may not be enthusiastic at first. Do not be discouraged. Attend organizing meetings with your plans laid out on paper, and be polite and persistent in your goals.

Start slowly—add one new aspect every few events, and allow participants to get excited about supporting the “value added” activities.

The Social Pavilion

When you have a mixed bag of camping setups, it's often a good idea to establish a centrally-located “social pavilion” area, from which you run a multitude of mini-events within your event weekend. This pavilion is simply a large square canvas fly or two, providing shaded seating space for participants. Bench or chair seating is a bonus.

When events have a “special impressions” area, the social pavilion fits nicely there. Otherwise, locate the pavilion in a well-trafficked area, easy to see and reach by participants and event spectators. (Ideally, you'll also be within a short walk to toilets and drinking water!)

Set up the pavilion as early as possible. It serves as a “home base” through the event. If your events have a Citizen's registration or information booth, locate the social pavilion close by.

To use the social pavilion most effectively, you'll want a few usage rules. Period dress is a must for hobby participants, no matter the hour of day. Banning modern items (like soda cans, coolers, modern foods, etc) from the pavilion helps create the period illusion for the participants and public. State these prohibited items politely but firmly, and kindly enforce the prohibitions during events by taking offenders aside and privately asking their cooperation.

Fantastic Fridays

Friday afternoon is often the “set up” time; once living quarters are established, free hours could be well-spent with some short informational workshops and skill seminars held right at the event. What about a bodice-fitting demonstration? Lessons in gauging and setting skirts? Fire safety? What to look for in repro clothing? Those who couldn't normally afford to travel to a conference will be eager to fit a workshop or two in on Fridays, and camaraderie between groups can grow. If you have a planned event schedule for

the year, you can run a series of related workshops, benefiting all.

Friday afternoons are a great time for a short information meeting, distributing the last-minute details on event activities (which, of course, you'll have advertised well in advance, to draw even more citizens to the event!)

School Days

Does your club have a large number of families with children, or a high number of teen girls? Enlist some of the younger (or older) women and form a “primary school” with short lesson schedules during the event days.

The school might also be used as a safe area for all the children to be kept amused and busy while parents set up the living quarters before the event.

The teacher can limit her interaction to the hobby participants (using another “teacher” as a docent to explain the scenario to the public), or might invite spectators to sit down and join the lesson with the children.

Teenage girls will often enjoy a “finishing school” or “young ladies' seminary” experience. There are a wide variety of non-academic options for teen participation, including patriotic sewing, fundraising, and other war-related efforts. Be sure the Headmistress has a good research base in the education of girls mid-century, so she can introduce them to actual historic ideas, rather than a romantic “vision” of the past. (Put teen boys to work helping with setup!)

Sartorial Saturday

Many women are stalled in their physical impression by a simple lack of skill in creating a period-appropriate hairstyle. Plan a “Do” workshop early each morning, and participants can assist one another with pomade, pins, and the creation of a simple “do”. In pre-event information, share a hair kit list: comb, pins, pomade or hair dressing, switches, and invisible hair nets will cover most sartorial situations. The activity leader will want to have a stock of extra supplies on hand, as well.

The New Tea Party

If the event has a tradition of a “ladies tea”, take that framework and add to it for a more period experience. Change the official title to “Ladies’ Tea Reception,” and plan a short informational lecture (15-20 minute) with social time after. The social format of an educational lecture followed by visiting and refreshments would be familiar to a woman of the era, and it’s a great “stealth” way to provide wider knowledge of the era to your participants.

Anyone with a passion, and willingness to research their topic and present it in an engaging way will make a great lecture guest. Dressed in accurate period clothing, and speaking on any period topic, they’ll be providing entertainment and education. And, the reception guests will have something period to discuss for the rest of the day—a great way to stem “hobby chat”!

Topics you might look at: temperance, abolition, women’s rights, women’s education, science, technology, literature, music, art, travel, mission work, fundraising for soldier’s aid, political philosophy, ancient philosophy, archaeology, paleontology, exploration, westward migration; the list is truly endless!

It’s Debatable

Another familiar social event is the public debate. This, too, is a “stealth education” activity. Two to three debaters, in period clothing and armed with a stock of memorized period quotes and passages on the planned topic, present their arguments for and against any controversial period topic—and they don’t have to be serious topics to be controversial! Public debates draw spectators as well as participants. As with the Tea Reception, keep the debate portion short—1-2 minutes per debater for each debate point is not too long to hold attention. A maximum of 5-7 debate points keeps the whole presentation short, but long enough to feel like an “event”.

This scenario calls for a great deal of preparation from the debaters. They will need to use actual period lectures as their speech base, so it doesn’t turn into over-

the-top theatrics. I was a disappointed spectator at one such scenario a few years ago in Montana—it could have been fantastic, as the set-up was four different 19th century people debating women’s rights. Had each memorized a stock of original quotes and passages from these individuals (all were prolific writers/publishers), and delivered those as “impromptu statements”, going back and forth, it would have been amazing. Instead, they wore “historic-ish” clothing, and used totally modern “acting” to “imagine” what the originals “might have said.” For the most impact, do it from original sources.

Dance Fever

There’s no reason to confine all dancing to an evening party! Find a willing caller, and conduct 30-minute dance practice sessions through the day. You’ll find willing participants in the public spectators as well as hobbyists. You’ll want to be sure to have either a handy fiddler for live music, or good batteries for “canned” music. With canned music and spectator involvement, don’t try to create a 100% authentic “dancing school” setting; the goal is an educational experience and a lot of fun for all. (The one challenge with dancing classes: lack of participation from the soldiering population! This leads to a large number of women dancing with one another at the evening dance parties, which is not, in itself, inaccurate to the time.)

Quality Quilting Bees

Your social pavilion gets another workout with a public quilting bee. Over the course of a season, a group of interested ladies can hand-piece, quilt, and finish a fantastic reproduction quilt. Spectators will enjoy watching, too.

Select one or two people to be “quilt docents”, chatting for 2-3 minutes as needed about different aspects of period quilting: techniques, block options, fabric selection, uses of quilts, fundraising, etc.

Add a period element for the quilters with someone reading aloud from period magazines, tracts, books, the bible, a travel article, newspapers. This is another “stealth” opportunity to expand the general knowledge of the era, giving

participants things to think on in common with our era’s original people.

Quilting is also fantastic for those who feel shy about “first person”—quilting silently *is* “first person!” With established docents willing to interact with the public (in first or third person), other quilters can sit back and enjoy, but still provide a fantastic experience for other participants and spectators.

The selection of block and quilting styles, fabrics, and other materials is an important part of recreating this experience well; do the necessary research to ensure your quilt plan fits with period aesthetics and practices.

Quilts serve another purpose: fundraising. Now as then, you can plan to raffle or auction your finished quilt, with proceeds going toward a worthy cause: Soldier’s, Widow’s, or Orphan’s Aid in their era, Historic Preservation in ours. This parallel draws in spectators, as they have the chance to participate by purchasing tries in the raffle (be clear about the final raffle date, so they don’t expect to head home with it Saturday night, and make sure you abide by any state or local laws regulating raffles.). You will need someone nearby (perhaps at the event information booth?) to handle ticket sales and collection.

The Sound of Music

Another activity with great participant and spectator “pull”: public performance of a Chorus. Organize an impromptu women’s, children’s, or family chorus, and entertain everyone with a short selection of historically appropriate songs! Singing Schools (with a Master paid by membership “subscription”) are one very interesting feature of mid-century social life, and can be easily replicated at most “smorgasbord” style events.

You’ll need to make small folded books of public-domain period music, get out a pitch pipe and someone willing to patiently teach, and then gather a group at the event, practicing for a few sessions here and there with the goal of a public (spectator and event participant) performance once or twice in the event.

For a unifying effect, construct ribbon rosettes to pin on all Chorus singers; this salves a desire for “performance

costumes”; everyone wears regular historic clothing for each performance.

If you do have a large group of teenage girls interested in regular patriotic performances, consider hosting sewing days to help each girl construct a white, sheer cotton dress. Worn with red and blue sashes, belts, and waists, these give a uniform look as well—and there’s something particularly attractive about a group of teenage singers in white lawn and silk sashes! (This idea will require at least 6 months of lead-time, however.)

With a core group, you can make the Chorus a year-round activity, practicing more complex pieces between events. Again, this gives participants something period to do, is entertaining for participants and spectators, and is far more participatory than shopping.

A Fashion Revolution

Fashion presentations are a key way to catch the attention of reenactors and spectators (yet another “stealth” educational tool!)

There are fairly defined categories of period clothing. Use these to organize the fashion presentation in a logical, flowing manner. Some possible division: Infants & Children; Men’s Professional and Trade (or general citizen); Women’s Undergarments; Working Attire; “Better” clothes; High Fashion and Specialty clothes (ball gowns, swimming costumes, riding habits); Outerwear & Headwear; Special Impressions (Religious, Suffrage, Temperance Uniforms, etc.)

The worst case scenario for a fashion show commentator is the “open call” event, when interested parties arrive, and all expect to be featured in the show. Whether the garments are accurate or not, the narrator is forced to say *something*. Off-the-cuff commentating can lead to some pretty large inaccuracies passed along as fact.

Avoid the hassle by hosting *scripted shows*, rather than open call. With a scripted show, specific ensembles are featured; non-featured garments are not presented, and only a few examples of each ensemble are needed. The commentary can be sketched beforehand, and edited to ensure its accuracy.

If your group is used to only open call shows, there will be some disgruntlement at first. You must be polite and firm in order to avoid very large hassles. Depending on the event scenario, you may choose to handle the registration before the event, or organize it on-site the day before the show.

The *pre-registered* presentation calls for applications filled out, and photos submitted, in the months prior to the event. The selections are narrowed, participants are selected and notified, and invitation cards are issued. It is most effective for small events wherein comprehensive material culture guidelines are passed out with registration materials; the invitation to submit a photo and description for the fashion show can be included in these materials. Of course, this is not the way most events work.

More commonly, an *on-site organization* is needed. The commentator will need two or three assistants who have a good eye for period clothing, and who will help her select participants for the show.

The day before the show (or at least several hours prior to it!), the show staff walks through the event areas, and personally invite people to participate wearing the clothing they are currently wearing. Each “finder” may be given a certain quota (select 4 working attire, and two children), or may find one example of each category presented.

Keep track of the invitations issued is by using a two-part invitation card (one possible style is found on page four of this article. It may be photocopied.) The portion kept by the staff details the person’s name, unit affiliation, category of clothing, description of clothing, and any remarkable details that should be pointed out during the show. The portion given to the invited participant includes the show assembly time, place, and a brief description of the ensemble they are invited to wear.

When the time comes to *assemble for the show*, review the invitations, sort participants into categories, and arrange the comment cards similarly. The show can be presented smoothly, without inaccurate ensembles or statements.

Presenting *Tableaux* (pronounced *tab-blow*) is a very scripted way to show different modes of clothing. Participants are grouped into scenes on stage, and the narrator describes both clothing and the setting. Tableaux might include Times of the Day; Breakfast at Home; The Charity Sewing Circle; Shopping; At the Party; At School; An Evening At Home with Family; Seeking Refuge; At Church.

Participants will need a few props in addition to their clothing (a table, some chairs, baskets, etc). With about 5 minutes for each setting, this presentation is particularly effective in communicating when various sorts of clothes are the most typical.

Group Assembly set-ups have each category gather near the narrator in a group. The narrator then moves down the lineup, describing common features and interesting items for each in turn.

You might also use a *Runway* set-up: organize the participants off-stage, and as each is announced, they walk down a strip or platform with spectators seated or standing around. A pause at the end of the platform, and a few slow turns, allows the narrator plenty of time to comment on the ensemble while the spectators get a good view of each outfit. Be sure to explain that normal walking and turning will suffice—no need to strut or sway!

Children and shy people will usually be more comfortable if they are sent down the runway with a partner. Babies and toddlers can be carried or accompanied by a parent (don’t let a modern stroller on the stage!)

Summing Up

With a multitude of activities and scenarios you can add to “smorgasbord” events, you can encourage your citizens to learn more about period life, while giving them interesting experiences. When people have interesting historic experiences to chat about, modern “hobby chat” is less likely to distract from time-travel moments. What value will you add to the citizen’s event experience this season?

Section: _____

Participant: _____

Group Affiliation (if any): _____

Of Note:

Please Participate in the Fashion Review!

Invitation Issued to: _____

Garments: _____

Assembly Location: _____

Time: _____

Please have an adult accompany minors.

Section: _____

Participant: _____

Group Affiliation (if any): _____

Of Note:

Please Participate in the Fashion Review!

Invitation Issued to: _____

Garments: _____

Assembly Location: _____

Time: _____

Please have an adult accompany minors.

Section: _____

Participant: _____

Group Affiliation (if any): _____

Of Note:

Please Participate in the Fashion Review!

Invitation Issued to: _____

Garments: _____

Assembly Location: _____

Time: _____

Please have an adult accompany minors.

Section: _____

Participant: _____

Group Affiliation (if any): _____

Of Note:

Please Participate in the Fashion Review!

Invitation Issued to: _____

Garments: _____

Assembly Location: _____

Time: _____

Please have an adult accompany minors.