

The event, staged by the nonprofit Northwest Civil War Council, is expected to draw enthusiasts from Washington, California, Nevada, Idaho and Canada.

In addition to live battles, attendees can see demonstrations of artillery, cavalry, music, medicine and clothing of the Civil War era. In tented villages, craftsmen, cooks and medics show their work as practiced in the 1860s.

While some reenactors represent a specific historical character, others portray a general category of person.

Elsewhere in the country, there's been discussion about whether women should represent male soldiers on the battlefield. But with more understanding about the numbers of women who masqueraded as male soldiers during the Civil War, some reenactment groups have increasingly accepted women in military ranks.

Women are represented in other roles as well, including those embedded within army units to work as field nurses, cooks and spies.

Like putting on a play

Julie Bishop, of Dallas, Ore., will play the part of a Confederate woman.

She was first drawn to reenacting by her children, who played with the band. Her favorite part of the weekend, she said, is enjoying the music and the theater, as well as "watching the kids running around, getting dirty and learning so much."

Wearing the clothing and sleeping in period tents helps Bishop "understand what the women went through and had to deal with in that era," she said.

Michael Larsen, of Yakima, Wash., was drawn to the music. He plays marches on an authentic reproduction rope-tension drum. Many of the songs he performs are more than 200 years old and were played during the Revolutionary War.

Larsen — who has several relatives who fought in the original conflict — teaches drum lessons to children and has organized a kids' drumming corps for 19 years for the reenactment. He's "always impressed with the knowledge of the local reenactors," he said. "They read many journals and letters to understand what happened."

Don Benson, vice chairman of the Northwest Civil War Council, was drawn to Civil War reenacting as a way to connect with his ancestors: He had four grandfathers and nine uncles who fought for the Union, including one who spent seven months incarcerated in the infamous Andersonville prison.

Benson started with World War II reenacting but switched over to Civil War events, which he said are "more like putting on a play in that they are more rehearsed and planned."

Benson serves as company commander for the 7th Michigan Cavalry Brigade. He loves the adrenaline of riding on the field,



ERICK BENGEL PHOTOS

For the 2015 Civil War Reenactment, Steve Holgate, in character as Abraham Lincoln, delivers a rousing presentation outside the Fort Stevens Museum about the 16th U.S. president's background and his trials during the American Civil War. The presentation included The Gettysburg Address and selections from Lincoln's political speeches.



Three new Confederate recruits — Rose Kulla (left), of La Center, Wash.; Mary Kandoll (center), of Amboy, Wash.; and Moriah Kulla, of Yacolt, Wash. — ready themselves for the afternoon battle re-enactment at Fort Stevens State Park in 2015.

and started riding horses around the time he started walking.

Ignited passions

Fort Stevens State Park — which has an earthen fort built during the Civil War to guard the Columbia River from potential Confederate and British attacks — hosted the annual reenactment for 27 years. When the park stopped waiving fees for the Northwest Civil War Council, the reenactment group decided to relocate to the Clatsop County Fairgrounds. Reenactors are cautiously optimistic about the new venue, though many say they will miss the connections to the old site.

Meanwhile, debate over the ethics of Civil

War reenactments extends far beyond the region.

Last year's event took place weeks after the proposed removal of a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia, prompted a rally by white nationalists that turned deadly in August 2017.

The city of Manassas, Virginia, responded to the events in Charlottesville by canceling their Civil War Weekend that would have been held a few weeks later. Announcing the shut-down, Manassas city officials said, "Recent events have ignited passions in this country surrounding the Civil War and the symbols representing it." They also expressed concern for the safety of everyone involved.

IF YOU GO

CIVIL WAR REENACTMENT AND LIVING HISTORY

When: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 1 and 2; 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday, Sept. 3. Battles: 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; noon Monday.

Where: Clatsop County Fairgrounds, 92937 Walluski Loop, Astoria

Admission: \$8 per person, \$5 for children, military and seniors. Kids under 5 get in free. \$5 parking per vehicle.

More information: nwcwc.net.

Safety concerns seem to be valid considering Confederate reenactors were attacked with pepper spray during a parade in Newton, North Carolina, later in the year, and vandals knocked over a statue of a Confederate soldier in Columbus, Ohio. In October, police had to lock down a reenactment in Middletown, Virginia, after receiving bomb threats.

A Cleveland paper quoted Eli Beachy, a Confederate reenactor from Valley View, Ohio, who said he believes the controversy is a result of a misunderstanding of the purpose of reenactments. "We're not playing war, and we're not promoting hate speech," Beachy said. "We're representing an educational moment. Re-enacting is living theater, not promotion of moronic causes."

Learning by doing

Many modern reenactors consider themselves participants in "living history" that not only illuminates military history, but gives attendees the opportunity to learn about the daily way of life in the U.S. in the 1860s. Many participants devote long hours and sacrifice financially to carefully research and recreate the smallest details.

Individuals opposed to these events cite concerns over the glorification of war and concerns for the potential for hate speech and racism.

Here on the North Coast, such debates seemed far removed last year as participants sat in the grass at Fort Stevens listening to a demonstration on the petticoats women once wore and the acrobatic movements required to get into them. Nearby, a teen showed how to play the fife and drum, and told listeners that many Civil War drummers were as young as 12 years old.

"Some people learn by reading, but others learn by doing," Earl Bishop, chairman of the Northwest Civil War Council, said. "This event is history you can see, touch and smell. You can feel it." 