“Lincoln Days” Civil War battle reenactment

Story and photos by Mark Flotow

Between our state’s two largest river valleys, Lake Pittsfield is the site for “Lincoln Days” during the first weekend in June. This year’s 18th annual event, held under crowd-friendly weather, was sponsored by The Abe Lincoln Project/Looking for Lincoln in Pike County (a part of the 42-county Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area), and the city of Pittsfield. Although the two-day schedule featured a steady stream of programs and activities by the lake, perhaps the action highlight was a Civil War battle or skirmish featuring over 300 reenactors in the afternoons.

The Confederate and Union clash was a sensory spectacle of musketry pops and cannonading booms, accompanied by black powder smoke and breeze-borne whiffs thereof. The battle narrator, Dale Phillips (former superintendent of the Lincoln Home National Historic Site), gave attendees the wheres and whys of the infantry, cavalry, and artillery exchanges and maneuvers. After almost an hour, the Union and Confederate commanders agreed to a cessation, followed by the regathered opposing forces marching by the riser-seated audience to receive their thanks and applause. Immediately afterwards, visitors were welcome to ask questions of the reenactors and inspect a section of a Confederate battlefield trench.

Not to be overlooked were the other event activities: demonstrations and programs by the Union Naval Historical Society, a Civil War period baseball game, visiting the sprawling reenactor encampments, live period music, and other demonstrations, including blacksmithing and a U.S. observation balloon. The price is whatever it costs you to arrive there, plus whatever you care to buy from the various vendors of refreshments, dry goods, and specialty items.

The Lincoln Days gathering is part period rendezvous, part outdoor recreation, and part history exposure. The 1,600 or so visitors at this year’s event might agree that they took in sights, sounds, and even smells that often make long-remembered impressions.
The booming Union artillery belches smoke with each volley.


A chaplain’s encampment with visitor information.
A Confederate sergeant at ease.

Post-reenactment, onlookers inspect the constructed Confederate trench while reenactors receive some refreshment.

An array of some of the vendor tents and booths.

Shaved ice is timeless on any warm day.

With regimental flag flying, Confederate reenactors march past spectators after the performance. Note the barefooted soldier — a nice touch of realism, as all the reenactors take their craft seriously.