



## Banister descendants make appearance at 19th annual re-enactment

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PETERSBURG - This weekend re-enactors came together to portray British forces and Colonial volunteers during the Battle of Petersburg. It was the 229th anniversary of the battle fought on April 25, 1781.

"This is the first year that I've come as a re-enactor," said Dr. Stephen Rockenbach, assistant professor of history at Virginia State University. Rockenbach came to the event to play period music in the style of a minstrel. "I've come out before and always thought it's a really fantastic event."



Rockenbach said that this year friends of his suggested his name to the event organizers, who contacted him - the rest is history.

More than 200 people came out to the event on Saturday alone. Among those present were 16 descendants of the original owner of Battersea - Col. John Banister, a signer of the Articles of Confederation and the city's first mayor.

"We are all very excited about the trip to Petersburg. This opportunity to explore our heritage and share the sights and sounds of Battersea with the younger generations is one of a kind," said Elizabeth DeRamus in a press release. DeRamus is the great-great-great-great granddaughter of Banister, who commissioned the building of Battersea as his family home in 1768.

Events included battle re-enactments, a military hospital display, Colonial dancing lessons, house tours, live music and children's activities.

On Saturday morning, the descendants of Banister participated in a memorial wreath-laying ceremony commemorating the American and British soldiers who lost their lives in the Battle of Petersburg.

Tempy Barbru, executive director of the Battersea Foundation noted, "understanding and interpreting the history of Battersea is just one part of our mission. We see the villa and grounds as a living part of our community, and connecting with the Banister family is an example of how far our community extends."

The Banister family descendants look forward to a wonderful weekend in Petersburg, with a tour of the historic downtown area, a closer look at their ancestral family home, and a host of activities at the re-enactment that will appeal to all ages.

Rockenbach said that he's always been impressed with the re-enactment at Battersea.

"I think that if this event continues to remain of this caliber, it will just continue to grow," he said. "I believe it could get a lot bigger."

Rockenbach said that while Petersburg is known for its Civil War history, the Battle of Petersburg was an important one. He believes it to be so important he offers extra credit to his students who come to the event and write about the events.

"Watching events like this is probably one of the best ways to learn history," Rockenbach said. "Here's an opportunity for students to come see it. It gives them an appreciation for that style of warfare."

Jacquelyn Rook who came to the event Saturday said it was her first time ever at a re-enactment. She came not just to learn about the history of Battersea and the battle, but to get some first hand knowledge on re-enacting.

"I was looking for an event," Rook said. "I've started to make Colonial clothing."

Rook said that while she was afraid there might be rain Saturday, the weather ended up being beautiful. She said that the re-enactors not only were wonderful in their portrayal of historical figures - but their willingness to be photographed and share information.

"You can ask them just about anything," Rook said. She admitted that she was even surprised to learn that one of the male re-enactors had made his own garments. "He told me that he makes his clothes and his wife makes the women's clothing."

Mayor Annie M. Mickens said that from her perspective there was a lot more at this event than in previous years. "There's just so much here," she said.

Mickens added that the event was also largely a success due in part to the involvement from Fort Lee soldiers who helped staff the event.

Though the re-enactment is held at Battersea, the actual battle occurred near where Old Town Petersburg is today.

On that day a British army of 2,500 soldiers under the command of Maj. Gen. William Phillips attacked Petersburg to capture the large quantity of supplies they believed were stored in the city. They were confronted by a determined Virginia militia force of 1,000 commanded by Maj. Gen. the Baron von Steuben. The battle carried on for nearly three hours.

The end result was the Americans were compelled to retreat into Chesterfield County. Though they may have lost the battle, the defense of Petersburg during the battle bought enough time to evacuate the crucial supplies for Gen. George Washington's army.

The event continues today from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 1289 Upper Appomattox St., Petersburg.

On the Net: <http://www.batterseafound.org>.