

Suburban Life

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Civil War buffs

Union and Confederate soldiers meet for encampment in park

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

THE TWO YOUNG men responsible for bringing the first Civil War Encampment to Farmington and Farmington Hills are Sam Lowe and Tim Sheehy.

Lowe is 16, a student at Farmington High School who has studied the Civil War since fourth grade, said he got intense about the subject while he was in seventh grade, and has at least four ancestors he knows of who fought in that war.

Sheehy is 20, a graduate of Farmington High School, a student at Oakland Community College and a history buff for as long as he can remember.

Both think of themselves as "hard core Civil War enthusiasts."

Both are members of the 7th Michigan Volunteer Infantry, based in Lansing. Both have given performances or scenarios in their uniforms in area middle schools and high schools. Both have done a lot of traveling for re-enactments of various Civil War battles that have been staged throughout the country.

Lowe was in Gettysburg for a 125th anniversary mock battle. Sheehy has just returned from Virginia after a re-enactment of a battle there.

Because Michigan regiments are all Union regiments it was Sheehy who put out the call for Confederate regiments to be part of the encampment here. He got responses from regiments in Texas, Virginia and North Carolina.

The regiments will be welcoming visitors to their camp site 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday in Heritage Park. Entrance to the park is on the west side of Farmington Road between 10 and 11 Mile Road. There is no charge.

"THIS IS NO CHEAP hobby," Sheehy said. "What you are looking at here is about \$3,000 worth of gear."

The gear he spoke of ranged from

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—Tim Sheehy

the authentic-tailored Civil War uniforms and rifles down to the wooden comb, a copy of Harper's Weekly newspaper and a copy of a Civil War drill manual Sheehy pulled out of his knapsack.

Many of the Civil War buffs are collectors.

Lowe wears a 125 year old watch and fob with his uniform and carries a 125 year old straight razor in his knapsack.

All members of the regiments pay their own expenses when they volunteer to travel for a mock battle or an encampment, whether they go individually or in a group.

Their counterparts are the Michigan Ladies Relief Commission.

The ladies commission is attached to the regiment, but they do their own thing," Sheehy said. "This might be needlepoint or acting as spies or hiding medicine in their bell skirts, but they are definitely attached to the regiment."

Another facet of the regiment is the impersonations of famous personages in the Civil War.

"I don't think General Custer is going to be here next weekend but I do know the man who impersonates

(former Michigan) Gov. Blair will be," Lowe said. "Visitors will see the whole military schedule — fatigue duty, sick call, infantry drill, the whole thing."

LOWE DESCRIBES his involvement in the regiment as "An education for myself. Something you can't get out of a book. We stay in our tents overnight — no running to the nearest motel — and we grind our coffee beans with a rifle butt. On occasion it seems like I've broke some kind of time barrier."

Sheehy described his involvement as a you-are-there experience. "I've sewn on buttons by candlelight," he said.

All battles are choreographed, but even so as a soldier's friend falls in mock battle, the emotions are very real and highly intense.

"I was surprised at the extreme anger I felt in one of the battles," Sheehy said. "You know who is going to win and who is going to lose and how many of your men are going to fall. The rifles make a super loud sound and there is smoke all over the place and you just get caught up in it — You're really reliving it."

Lowe's experience has been similar.

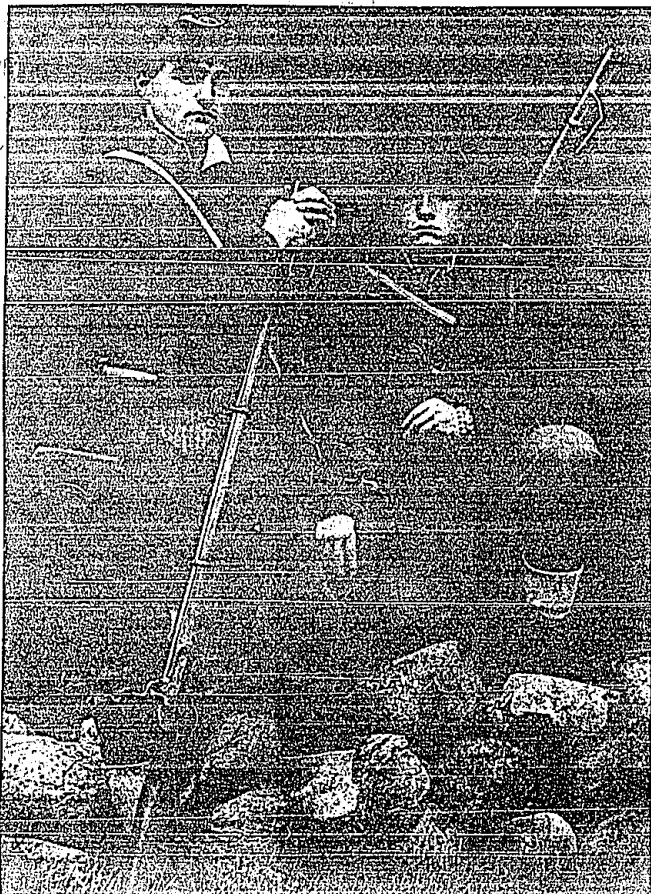
During a re-enactment of Pickett's Charge, Lowe said, "I felt as though I had really killed somebody."

Both expressed their thoughts of the pride their hobby has instilled in them.

"I have a great feeling of pride in portraying a soldier in a Michigan unit. It gets to us in our hearts," Sheehy said.

"I have great pride that I'm from Michigan. All of my feelings are instilled when I think of the part that Michigan played in the Civil War," Lowe said.

The Civil War Encampment is the first item on the agenda of activities for the 25th annual Founders Festival of Farmington-Farmington Hills.



RANDY BOST/retail photographer

Tim Sheehy (at left) and Sam Lowe will be in full battle uniform for the Civil War Encampment Saturday and Sunday in Heritage Park.

The history buffs have each invested about \$1,500 for their uniforms and gear.

Vying for the crown

Thirteen of the loveliest and most talented young women in Farmington and Farmington Hills will vie for the crown and the roses of victory in the 1989 Miss Farmington Scholarship Pageant. The contenders (from left standing) are Kathleen Kellor, Kerio Dwyer, Alison Ayres, Jackie Daly, Julie Stockel and Staci Docker. In the second row from left are Carrie Brown, Wendy Wojtowicz, and Amanda Niskor. Seated in front from left are Jennifer Goss, Lisa Carey, Tracy Acton and Gigi Ganatra. The pageant begins at 7 p.m. Wednesday, July 12, in Vladimira and winds up with the crowning of the new Miss Farmington. Tickets are on sale now in Farmington Area Chamber of Commerce, 33201 Grand River.

