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Local News

'Civil War' at Merton Williams

Sarah F. Lascari/Messenger Post Correspondent

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Seventh-graders Liz Steenhoff, Natalie Appleton, and Amelia Arrington play Spanish Civil War Bingo as Spanish teacher Karla Yessenow does the calling at Merton Williams Middle School in Hilton on Tuesday during Civil War Day. (STAFF PHOTO/ANMARI LINARDI)

"Ready! Aim! Fire!"

General Ulysses S. Grant's words echoed through the air, as Union and Confederate soldiers faced off and shots rang out.

The Battle of Shiloh revisited?

No, just another day of class for seventh-graders at Hilton's Merton Williams Middle School.

As part of Civil War Day on Tuesday, April 23, approximately 120 students participated in a battle demonstration with Mike Miller, who played Grant, and Tom Stanton, a Confederate re-enactor.

The event featured Miller, portraying the renowned Civil War general and the nation's 18th president, as well as several other re-enactors in traditional dress, including Stanton, along with his wife, and his daughter, Laura, an eighth-grader at Merton Williams. The Stantons' other three children also participate in local re-enactments with their family.

In addition to a battle demonstration, Middle school students learned the war's history through games and other classroom activities that make history fun.



"We're kind of feeling our way through it," said social studies teacher Johnna Roman, noting this is the first time for the event.

Roman, dressed in a traditional Civil War-era house dress, said the class will soon begin studying the Civil War.

"This was a nice prelude to it," Roman said.

The day began with Miller, also an economic development director in Brown County, Ohio, speaking about Grant's life, followed by break-out sessions allowing students to question Miller, listen to "book talks" with librarian Angela Ottman, focus on President Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, and view posters from the Civil War and images of slavery.

"I've got a mission, I guess," said Miller, who traveled 500 miles from Georgetown, Ohio, also the boyhood home of Grant, to participate.

"I can reach the kids," he said, noting he wants to give students a more realistic perception of Grant. Miller does about 20 to 30 similar appearances each year.

Born in 1822, Grant was a devoted and gentle family man, Miller said. While the general drank, especially during long periods of separation from his family, he was neither an alcoholic, nor a violent person, as history often portrays him, Miller said.

"He was a very unassuming person. Very quiet," Miller said of Grant, who died in July 1885, three days after completing his memoirs.

"It was really interesting to learn about all this happening," said Jenelle Schuler, 12, adding that hands-on learning is more fun.

Thirteen-year-old Sarah Faulknor said listening to Miller allowed her to empathize with Grant and better understand how difficult it must have been for soldiers during that time.

Audrey Stanton and her husband Tom, confederate re-enactors for the last eight years, offered commentary on day-to-day life in the Civil War era.

Audrey Stanton showed the many layers of traditional women's clothing, noting most women were ready to marry by age 14, and bear children by 16. Although soldiers were supposed to be 18, many were 14 or 15, Tom Stanton said, adding that sometimes women dressed as men and fought alongside their husbands.

Jaclyn Davis, 12, participates in re-enactments with the Stantons.

"The women didn't have as many rights as we do now," she said, adding that she feels lucky to live in a time where young girls do not have to worry about getting married and starting families.

Ronald Patton, 13, agrees.

"It'd be too soon. Ask anyone. No one wants to immediately leave home," to worry about the responsibilities of marriage and fighting in a war, he said.

Another harsh reality of life in the 1860s was slavery.

"I don't think it was right to do this stuff back then to these people," said 13-year-old Jeff Deong. "They're just like us. They just have darker skin."

Parent Debra Hebing, whose daughter Amanda is a student in Roman's class, praised Roman for using "hands-on-education" rather than just teaching from books.

Miller agreed.

"So many schools don't try to bring history alive," he said. "I'm glad to see that."

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► **Name:** [Joe Yuzamas](#)

Date: Apr, 29 2002

I wish all children could study two books. 'When in the course of human events' and 'The real Lincon'. This includes black children. Maybe in time they would understand what the NAACP and other groups are doing to destroy them.

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