

A Bonus Section for Our Alabama Readers

Alabama

people & places™

Step lively in Revolutionary times at
Montevallo's American Village.

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Around Your State

Guntersville—Bank on Creativity

Montgomery—A Century of Sweetness

Tuscaloosa—The Tide Rows New Waters

Birmingham—Soccer's Latino Leader

...and more

Southern Living

Lessons in Liberty



Revolutionary times feel like current events thanks to lively interpreters at The American Village.

Soldiers are rough on clothes,” says Nancy Moore, wielding needle and thread. “Buttons pop off. Seams unravel. Sparks from muskets burn jackets. I never run out of sewing chores.”

As costume coordinator for The American Village in Montevallo, Nancy knows mobcaps, waistcoats, shoe buckles, and other period garb worn by her fellow living-history actors. When she’s not portraying flag-designer Betsy Ross or other colonial women, she darns socks, mends

aprons, restitches hems, and fixes hook and eye fasteners.

The American Village, a six-year-old Alabama treasure located just south of Birmingham, turns historical subjects into lively encounters. Actors engage visitors amid vintage-style structures on a 113-acre campus. Whether protesting taxes, debating Constitutional matters, preparing for battle, dancing reels, or sewing, each interpreter exudes a palpable passion.

Revolution, Alabama Style

Anyone who enters this village is a potential recruit for patriot Jeremiah Martin’s army unit. Coordinator of historical research Christopher Long developed the fictitious soldier based on historical accounts and personal letters. With a barrel chest and a booming voice, Christopher wears the drill-sergeant mantle well.

“Form a line, you!” he barks. “What kind of battalion is this? You

In trying times, then or now, dancing offers a comforting balm.



PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN O'HAGAN

above, left: Coordinator of historical research Christopher Long musters schoolchildren as if they were recruits to his Continental army. **above:** Costume coordinator Nancy Moore keeps the colonial-era outfits up to snuff.

look like a gaggle of geese!” Soon he has guests marching with imaginary muskets and watching him fire a real flintlock weapon.

“This is education by immersion,” Christopher says, tugging at a loose thread (best see Nancy about that). “I think people leave here more aware of what it means to be American.”

Give Him Liberty

William Stewart injects a suitable intensity into the role of fiery orator Patrick Henry. Several times a day, from a chapel pulpit or elsewhere, he delivers the patriot’s famous “Give me liberty, or give me death!” speech with finger-wagging, ponytail-whipping, rafter-shaking fervor.

“Patrick Henry’s words still convey best America’s motivations for separating from England,” says William, a



graduate of Birmingham-Southern College involved in theater since age 10. “We give faces to the past and help people get the point.”

Civic Duty

Benjamin Franklin leans on a cane, peers over wire-rimmed spectacles, and grills fidgety fifth-graders on the three branches of government. Actually, that’s Phillip McEntee holding forth. A retired music teacher, Phillip lives near the village and came by one day out of curiosity. He was asked to play a vintage instrument, his specialty, for a promotional video. Then, before he knew it, he was Ben Franklin. And, frankly, he looks the part.

Clutching a parchment scroll, he welcomes entering visitors to a mock-up of the room where the Declaration of Independence was signed and the Constitution was drafted. Then he initiates a debate: Does the new nation need a king or a President?

“There are those who gave their lives for the freedom we enjoy,” Phillip concludes later. “To be an American citizen—what

As Patrick Henry, William Stewart shouts his “Give me liberty, or give me death!” speech with characteristic patriotic fervor.



Phillip McEntee started as a musician at The American Village and then emerged as a convincing Benjamin Franklin.

privileges that title bestows upon us and what an awesome burden of responsibility.”

Activities all over the village echo Ben’s call to citizenship. Al Schaefer bends ears as George Washington rallying troops. Frederick Hand, as freed slave James Armistead Lafayette, pours hot lead into musket-ball molds outside a canvas tent and later dances with other interpreters. “This place makes history click,” confides Nancy, a Samford University theater graduate, back at her sewing.

Sacred Fire

The American Village began in the imagination of Montevallo resident Tom Walker. For years, the father of three mulled over how to encourage civic involvement, instill patriotism, and improve the teaching of history. He hit on the notion of an action-packed living-history center. After lobbying community leaders, landing grants, securing a site, guiding construction, and hiring staff, Tom helped dedicate the

village in late 1999.

“Many Alabamians can’t go to Philadelphia or Boston to see firsthand the places where our nation was born,” says Tom, now executive director, “but they *can* come here. Liberty and citizenship are universal concepts, and we bring them to life in a memorable way.”

JOE RADA

The American Village: 3727 State 119, Montevallo, AL 35115; toll-free 1-877-811-1776 or www.americavillage.org.

George’s Place

Southern Living and The American Village are building a home modeled after George Washington’s Philadelphia residence. The *Southern Living* Showcase House is a three-story redbrick structure with fireplaces at each end and a walled garden. It demonstrates a melding of good design, quality construction, modern convenience, and historical architecture. Slated to open in the fall, it will serve as a tour home for a year and then provide a setting for the village’s interpretive programs.