

# Brattleboro Reformer

## History comes alive at the fair

By JAIME CONE / Reformer Staff

BRATTLEBORO -- If you visit the 3rd Annual Windham County History Fair this Saturday, be sure to say hello to Erastus Fairbanks, Vermont's governor at the outbreak of the Civil War. You can't miss him in his frock coat, vest and pork pie hat.

He'll also be carrying a gold-top cane, according to William L. McKone, the man who will bring the Green Mountain State's 21st and 26th governor to life.

In clothes more fitting for a soldier, McKone will also portray Captain John Lonergan, though he said at 72 he makes a more convincing governor.

"I often find that it's more useful for me to portray the governor to give a broader view of the political aspects of it and the process whereby Vermont recruited the soldiers and formed the units that went off to war," McKone said.

The Texas-born history reenactor moved to Vermont 30 years ago. He was visiting Lonergan's grave site when the dead man "grabbed me by the ankle and demanded that I tell his story," he said, and so he published the book "Vermont's Irish Rebel."

McKone is also a member of Vermont's governor-appointed Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission and has participated in war reenactments all over the country.

He will be in character all day at the history fair, which will be celebrating the sesquicentennial of the Civil War. This year marks the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Bull Run, the first major land battle of the war.

Vermont had a significant role in the Civil War despite the fact that no battles were fought here. According to McKone, of Vermont's 300,000 residents, about 30,000 went off to war.

"It's a very significant period in American history with a lot of echoes that are still resounding," he said.

"The political situation in this country in 2011 is frighteningly similar (to the Civil War era), and we need to learn about our history in order not to repeat

it," he added. "When you look back on the Civil War, you wonder how people could have been so blind to let that situation develop, but it has to do with a lack of civil dialogue on the part of people holding extreme political views, who were unable to come to a compromise."

McKone is just one of the many fun and educational attractions slated to be at the History Fair this year.

Award-winning journalist Becky Karush will be collecting Vermont's oral history, preserving the stories of local residents for future generations of Vermonters.

The event will also feature exhibits by the Vermont Historical Society, the Estey Organ Museum, the Brookline Round School House, and Brookline Church Preservation Association.

Historical societies from Brattleboro, Dover, Dummerston, Jamaica, Townshend, Vernon, Wardsboro, and Wilmington will also be present. In addition to their exhibits, many of the towns will have their published town histories for sale as well as other historic memorabilia (prints, cards, photographs) of the area.

Antique professionals will appraise any old treasures at the antique tent for a small donation fee.

Visitors can shop for handcrafted wares by crafters from the region and join walking tours of Newfane's historic district that will highlight residences and buildings removed early in the 19th Century from the old Town Common on Newfane Hill down to their current location in the Shire Village.

Judge John Wesley will give an insider's tour of the County Courthouse.

Food will be catered by the Newfane Cafe and Creamery, and live music with introductory square dancing will add to the day's festivities.

The Windham County History Fair will be held rain or shine Aug. 13 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the Newfane Town Common. The event is free of charge. For more information, contact the Windham County Historical Society at 802-365-4148.

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