



Because Mia and Greg Bennett participate in Civil War re-enactments, it was natural to built their wedding theme on that era. The couple and their guests dressed in costume and incorporated vows from that era into the wedding ceremony.

## Couple Duplicate Civil War Wedding

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**MILLERSVILLE** (Lancaster Co.) — Wedding styles generally reflect the bride's and groom's individuality. For Mia and Greg Bennett having a wedding typical of the Civil War Era seemed a natural extension of their shared love.

Both are involved in Civil War re-enactments, which recreate battles from that era for special events.

Bennett belongs to a Confederate unit called Wheat's Tigers, which was a Zouave unit from Louisiana patterned after French infantry. Mia is a camp woman.

The Bennetts camp in an authentic canvas tent — with no bottom — and cook over an open fire.

According to Mia, the long, full dresses are cool, because the hoop underskirt holds the fabric away from the body. Full costume for the women include a corset, pantolettes, chemise, modesty petticoat, regular petticoat, hoop or flounce, and skirt. Leather shoes fashioned after that time period complete the outfit.

The Bennetts are part of the Valley Division's 3,000 members, which includes units from Virginia, Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland, New York, and Pennsylvania.

"When you get into uniform, you really get into the character," Bennett said, who finds it easy to lapse into a Southern drawl.

The re-enactments are intended to be as authentic as possible. Bennett said that his battalion had been feared by the North and the South.

"The men were crazy, made up of a bunch of misfits and escapees from mental institutions. 'If they caught you, they killed you,'" Bennet said of written accounts of unruly behavior.

The Tigers, as they were nicknamed, were outfitted by a wealthy New Orleans citizen, A. Keene Richards.

Instead of wearing the traditional gray uniforms, the unit wore scarlet skullcaps with long tassels, red shirts, blue jackets, baggy blue trousers with white stripes and white leggings.

Bennett said that he had a crash course in drilling when he became a member. The unit dis-

plays a Napoleon-style fighting using actual battlefield scripting.

Black powder and caps are used and soldiers fall down when hit. Fake blood adds reality to the re-enactment.

The main difference between re-enactment and the original battles is that the units know ahead of time how long the battle will last and who will win the battle.

In addition to the military battles, re-enactments include civilians, camp followers, hospital personnel, and women who portray roles typical of the era.

Military re-enactments only take up a few hours of the day, but history continues to unfold as the unit members set up camp. While cooking and sitting around the camp fire, visitors drop by to talk with the members or to eavesdrop on conversation typical of that time period.

Union Army members argue with Confederate Units, "not in a nasty way, but when we put on that uniform, it's almost like someone flips a switch, and we are Confederate soldiers," Bennett said.

Because Bennett represents the Confederate side, he argues that the Confederate flag is misunderstood. "It was not designed as a hate object or to represent white sheets and shaved heads," Bennett said. "The flag is designed to support state rights and soldiers who wore gray, a symbol of America."

"The things taught in school are only partly true," Bennet said of Civil War history. He grew up fascinated with history and being part of the re-enactment makes him research continually.

"The Civil War," Bennett claims, "was fought to defend state's rights, and slavery was a minor issue."

While the units debate issues of the Civil War era, they do not debate current politics, which is strictly forbidden by the bylaws.

Members pay annual \$30 dues. Members also pay for their own uniforms. Army supplies such as black powder and firewood are provided at the re-enactments.

Bennett's officer's dress uniform cost \$125. Mia said that seamstresses can save money if they sew their own gowns. Her favorite part of the re-enactment is dressing up, although for the camp she dresses in work

clothes.

Women are not allowed to wear makeup and must keep long hair to pin up or wear a hair extension during the re-enactments.

Mia said that her wedding dress was an authentic ball gown typical of the era.

The bridal party, and most of the guests also dressed in costume. Some sewed their own outfits and others rented or borrowed them.

The May 26th wedding was held in Washington Boro in a church that had been built during the Civil War era. Although it isn't documented, the Bennetts said that hearsay surrounding the church's history is that the church was burned by Confederates during a skirmish in Columbia and rebuilt in 1872 after the war.

The couple tried to incorporate as much history into the wedding as possible. The pastor researched documents and found wedding vows from that era that he read for the ceremony.

The arch of swords used during ceremonial events was re-enacted for the recessional.

Re-enactments are a great hobby for couples, the Bennetts said.

"It's something we can do together instead of having separate hobbies," Mia said. "It's something that children enjoy also and can become involved in doing." Mia has two children from a previous marriage, who sometimes participate.

During the summer, the Bennetts participate in re-enactments about every other weekend. Most are in Pennsylvania, but they also travel to Maryland and West Virginia.

Recruits are needed. If interested, contact the Bennetts are (717) 871-8459.

Some upcoming re-enactments in which the Bennetts will participate include the following: Bealington, W.V., July 15-16; Twin Bridges, Aug. 4-8; Waynesboro, Aug. 18-20; Taneytown, Md., Aug. 25-27; Lebanon, Sept. 15-17; Middletown, Sept. 29-Oct. 1; St. Thomas, Oct. 6-8; Wax Museum, Gettysburg, Oct. 20-22; Harpers Ferry, W.V., Nov. 11; Remembrance Day, Gettysburg, Nov. 18; and Lee/Jackson Day, Baltimore, Md., Jan 13, 2001.

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