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Crowds gather to see skirmish, Lincoln at Spring Mill

Folks brave chilly weather for events

By Derrek Tipton

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MITCHELL — Shot after shot, the gunfire rang out at Spring Mill State Park's Pioneer Village Saturday.

The park hosted its winter Civil War battle,

drawing about 120 people to the event, according to Spring Mill officials.

About 97 people packed into the Grist Mill to hear a speech by Abraham Lincoln, played by Danny Russel, according to Spring Mill program coordinator Coletta Prewitt.

She said the "weather had attendance down a

little bit." Still, Prewitt said it was "pretty cool" there were that many people on hand to hear "Lincoln" speak in spite of the chilly temps.

"I had a guy ... from Fishers, Indiana, said they drove all the way down, they read it in the paper ... and said that it was amazing, that Abraham Lincoln blew him out of

the water," Prewitt said.

Russel, who is from Indianapolis, said it was his second time at Spring Mill while in character as Lincoln.

"I couldn't be happier," he said. "If you can get 97 people out on a cold, blustery winter day, that is validation as an actor; laughter and applause and a full house."

For about 10 years, Russel has been portraying Lincoln. He also plays characters like Daniel Boone and James Whitcomb Riley.

He said he received grant funding from the Indiana Arts Commission to research Lincoln. Russel visited the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.,

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Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and other places.

"Once I had all my primary sources, I was able to write a script and got that approved for touring purposes," Russel said. "And I've been on the road ever since."

Russel and Civil War reenactors weren't the only ones dressed up for the day.

Paul Norton, who was

there to support his friend and reenactor Ivan Vargas, and his two children, Gabriel and Valerie, wore attire fitting for the occasion.

"Last year I dressed up in a peacoat and a top hat, and this year I decided to put a uniform on," Norton said.

For Norton, it's interesting to see how soldiers fought during the Civil War.

"As a retired military guy myself, retired infantry, seeing the tactics is a little startling, how they used to fight," he said. "But it's

very interesting to watch them, because (the reenactors) studied all the tactics of how they used to do it in the Civil War. Watching them battle and such, it's a lot of fun."

Brian Fouts made the drive from New Albany with his wife Sara and son Ethan to witness the battle. He visits Spring Mill three or four times a year, and he said he's been to reenactments at Spring Mill "many times."

Fouts, who was carrying

a camera, said he "kind of got hooked" on going to reenactments.

Orleans resident Chris Swayner brought his 9-year-old son Eli to the village to check out the battle. Eli said it was a cool thing to do and helps people learn more about the Civil War. It was Eli's second time seeing a reenactment.

The first time he saw one, Eli said it was "cool, but loud" — since cannons were used during that event.



Reenactors with the 49th Indiana Infantry stand at attention at the Pioneer Village at Spring Mill State Park Saturday. The group helped re-create a Civil War battle. (Derrek Tipton / Times-Mail)