

Performing the Past:
A Cultural History of Historical Reenactments



Stephen Gapps
BA(Hons) Syd; MA (Public History) UTS

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of Technology, Sydney

2002

Acknowledgments

Just as a reenactment does not succeed with the work of one person alone, many people have contributed to this thesis.

I thank and apologise to all the friends I have put on hold over time and hope that in reading this work they may forgive what at times may have appeared a self-obsessed project. I promise to renew valued friendships soon.

I have appreciated the help and professionalism of the staff of various research institutions including the National Library of Australia, the Archives Office of NSW and the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

I thank the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the Australian National University for the opportunity to participate in an extended interdisciplinary seminar Writing Voyages and Encounters in 1999. The staff and other postgraduates were an inspiration.

I thank overseas historians and reenactors for their insights and encouragement, in particular, Cathy Stanton whose experiences as an American Civil War reenactor in the US and work as a public historian has been inspirational.

The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) has provided generous financial support and resources. This thesis arose from my interest in public history, fostered via the UTS Public History postgraduate program that, due to the efforts of Ann Curthoys, Heather Goodall and Paula Hamilton, always felt like being at the cutting edge of history and theory. Other academic staff at the University that have been especially supportive of my project I thank in particular are Paul Ashton, Heather Goodall and Stephen Muecke.

I have benefitted from the dynamic intellectual culture among fellow UTS students Fiona Allon, Allison Cadzow, Joanne Duggan, Kate Evans, Roger Haden, Enno Herman, Mike Horniblow, Dianne Knott, Damian Lucas, Maria Nugent, Sigrid

McCausland, Yuji Sone, Melanie Swalwell and, in particular, Francis Maravillas and Vicki Karaminis,

I thank my fellow reenactors and friends who have always been generous with their stories of and visions for reenactment. Just as historians should be – at times inspiring and at others infuriating – reenactors’ skills and energy have provided the source of this thesis. I thank the following people in particular: Ross Argent, Sarah Bembrick, Neil Chippendale, Francis Daley, Ben Evison, Simon Fowler, Carola Joerg, Brett Kenworthy, Mark Koens, Bill Lincoln, Nick Potts, Ricarda Reeck, David Sanders and especially John Tierney and the ever-enthusiastic Jayson Bell.

My friends and family have been most generous. I thank Angela Taylor for her support over the years. I thank my father Leslie Gapps, my sister Suzanne and in particular my mother Barbara Gapps for her always warm encouragement and for being an inspiring example for me through her achievements over the years.

I especially thank my grandparents William and Roma Baldwin and Golda Gapps whose stories and lives have always been a source of inspiration.

My supervisor Paula Hamilton has been crucial to this thesis. Her enthusiasm for my project has constantly reminded me how interesting my work will be to others. I have appreciated her support for my academic career. Most importantly, her insightful comments, suggestions and intellectual discussion have always been invigorating and inspiring and I warmly thank her for her contributions to this project.

And finally, I thank my dearest friend Kate Evans without whose intellectual discussion, encouragement to write this thesis, emotional support, and draft reading and editing skills this thesis would neither have emerged nor come to fruition.

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Certificate of Authorship/ Originality	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of illustrations	vi
Abstract	xxi
Chapters	
History and Performance: An Introduction	1
One: Authenticity Matters	55
Two: A Hundred Years of Recycled 'Cooks'	98
Three: Some Posthumous Performances of Captain Arthur Phillip	133
Four: From Symbolic Interlude to Salient Plot: Reenacting 'Pioneer Woman'	165
Five: 'Blacking Up' for the 'Explorers' of 1951	199
Six: Pioneer Villages and Medieval Knights: Living History Museums and Historical Reenactment Societies in the 1970s	240
Seven: Historical Reenactors: The (Im)possibilities of Representing History on the Body	296
Performance and History: Some Conclusions	331
Bibliography	342

List of Illustrations

Figure on title page

Reenactment event aboard the *Batavia*, National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 2001.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 1

Reenactment soldier being fitted with uniform, 1938.

(Hood Collection, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

Figure 2

The author at Medieval reenactment, Armidale, NSW, 2000.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 3

Reenactment event, Old Sydney Town, 2001.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 4

Old Sydney Town pamphlet, *Re-Creating the Birth of a Nation, 1788-1810*.

(Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

Figure 5

Reenactment event aboard the *Batavia*, National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 2001.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 6

Napoleonic reenactment event, Old Sydney Town, 1999.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 7

American Civil War reenactment event, Sussex, England, 1999.

(Collection of Gordon Jones, US)

Figure 8

Society for Creative Anachronism, September 1970.

(<http://www.earlysca.homestead.com/>)

Figure 9

Seventeenth-century reenactment, Taminick Military Encampment, Victoria, 1998.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 10

American Civil War reenactment, including the author, Taminick Military Encampment, Victoria, 1998.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 11

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations, Manly.
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM No A59/35)

Figure 12

American Civil War reenactment — Confederate soldiers — Victoria, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 13

Historical Timeline Event, Kirby Hall, Britain, 1999.
(<http://home-4tiscali.nl/~t401243/kirby/>)

Figure 14

Guidebook, *Sovereign Hill*, Sovereign Hill Museums Association, 1998.
(Sovereign Hill)

Figure 15

Guidebook, *Sovereign Hill*, Sovereign Hill Museums Association, 1998.
(Sovereign Hill)

Figure 16

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations, 'Australia's March to Nationhood'.
(Hood Collection, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

Figure 17

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

Figure 18

Anniversary Landing of Captain Cook at Kurnell, c 1928.
(Small Picture File, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)
(Hereafter: SPF, ML, SLNSW)

Figure 19

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)

Figure 20

Gates of Centennial Park, Sydney, Commonwealth Celebrations, 1901
(*Australian Commonwealth Celebrations, Sydney 1901*, Page 13. ML SLNSW F980.1/A)

Figure 21

Federation arch, Sydney, Commonwealth Celebrations, 1901.
(ML SLNSW PXD 789-69)

Figure 22

'Wayward', Sydney-based Renaissance and Medieval music group, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 23

Ross Argent, reenactment event aboard the *Batavia*, National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 24

The author as a child, with camouflage and bow-and-arrow, c 1972.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 25

Still from ABC/BBC/ 20th C Fox television series 'Ben Hall', c 1974.
(Reproduced in book upon which series was based: Frank Clune, *Ben Hall*, Angus & Robertson, (1947) 1974.)

Figure 26

Hawkesbury Heritage Farm, 1999.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 27

Sovereign Hill, Ballarat, c 1980.
(Sovereign Hill Collection)

Figure 28

Reenactment event, Old Sydney Town, 1999.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 29

American Civil War Reenactment, Taminick Military Encampment, Victoria, 1997.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 30

'Wayward', Sydney-based Renaissance and Medieval music group, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 31

Hotel d'Zouave: reproduction sepia print of contemporary American Civil War Reenactment, Australia — Taminick Military Encampment, Victoria, 1997.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 32

Reenactment event aboard the *Batavia*, National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 2001.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 33

Taminick Military Encampment, Victoria, 1998.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 34

Armidale Living History Weekend, Armidale, NSW, 2000.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 35

Armidale Living History Weekend, Armidale, NSW, 2000.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 36

Armidale Living History Weekend, Armidale, NSW, 2000.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 37

Page of advertisements for reenactment clothing and equipment.

(*Revival*, August 1999)

Figure 38

Provisions for American Civil War reenactment, Australia.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 39

Taminick Military Encampment, Victoria, 1998.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 40

Society for Creative Anachronism event, 1999.

(Photograph by Mark Round, to accompany article 'Once Upon a Time' by Jane Cadzow, 'Good Weekend' colour supplement, *Sydney Morning Herald* 27 March 1999, pp 34–35.)

Figure 41

Taminick Military Encampment, Victoria, 1998.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 42

Timeline event, Fort Gelibrand, Victoria, 2002.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 43

American Civil War Reenactment, Sydney Park, St Peters, NSW, 1997.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 44

Reproduction sepia print of contemporary American Civil War Reenactment, Australia — including the author — Taminick Military Encampment, Victoria, 1997.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 45

Armidale Living History Weekend, Armidale, NSW, 2000.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 46

Medieval village, Armidale Living History Weekend, Armidale, NSW, 2000.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 47

Viking Longhouse, Armidale Living History Weekend, Armidale, NSW, 2000.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 48

Taminick Military Encampment, Victoria, 2000.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 49

Taminick Military Encampment, Victoria, 1997.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 50

'Tent City', Kirby Hall 'Time-line Event' UK 1999.
(<http://home-4fiscali.nl/~t401243/kirby/>)

Figure 51

American Civil War reenactment, Bairnsdale, Victoria, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 52

'62nd New York', American Civil War 'Route March', Glenrowan, Victoria, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 53

Painted portrait of of Capt James Cook, Royal Navy, FRS, 1728-1779 by Nathaniel Dance (1734-1811).
(National Maritime Museum, Greenwich — Small Picture File, Mitchell Library, SLNW, Pic Acc 6000)

Figure 54

Author's school composition book, Year 1, Blacktown West Primary School, 1970.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 55

Portrait, Captain James Cook.
(Front cover, *Australasian Life*, January 1908. ML, SLNSW)

Figure 56

Captain James Cook landing at Botany Bay.
(Cover of *The BP Magazine*, 1 June 1931, following the oil painting by Raymond Lindsay.
SPF, ML, SLNSW)

Figure 57

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney — PHM A59/21)

Figure 58

Historic Pageant at Vaucluse House, 1932
(*Sydney Mail*, 1932)

Figure 59

J A Gilfillan, 'Captain Cook Taking Possession of NSW in Botany Bay, 1770'
(SPF, ML, SLNSW)

Figure 60

E Phillips Fox, (Painting) 'The landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay', 1902.
(National Gallery of Victoria. Reproduced in Graeme Alpin, S G Foster and Michael McKernan, *Australians: A historical dictionary*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Assoc, 1987, p 324.)

Figure 61

Montagu Scott, (Colour lithograph) 'The ceremony of unveiling the statue of Captain Cook, Hyde Park, Sydney.' Supplement to the *Illustrated Sydney News*, 22 March 1879.
(SPF, ML, SLNSW)

Figure 62

Statue of Captain James Cook Hyde Park, Sydney c 1900.
(SPF, ML, SLNSW)

Figure 63

Diorama in Historical Society Exhibition, 1938.
(GPO 27411, ML, SLNSW)

Figure 64

Anniversary Landing of Captain Cook at Kurnell, 1901.

(SPF, ML, SL NSW)

Figure 65

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations — Reenactment of Captain Cook's landing, Kurnell.
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM P3066-10)

Figure 66

Captain Cook's statue in Avoca Street, Randwick, as it appeared about 1880.
(SPF ML, SLNSW, Pic Acc 2037)

Figure 67

Reenactment of landing of Captain Cook, 1970
(Jillian Robertson, *The Captain Cook Myth*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1981, p 17.)

Figure 68

Reenactment of landing of Captain Cook, 1970
(Jillian Robertson, *The Captain Cook Myth*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1981, p 14.)

Figure 69

1970 Cook Celebrations: display at Coles Supermarket, Sydney.
(SPF, ML, SLNSW)

Figure 70

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations: display at Mark Foys Department Store, Sydney.
(GPO 27382, ML, SLNSW)

Figure 71

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/35)

Figure 72

Newcastle 150th Anniversary Celebrations, 1947.
(ML, SLNSW, Home and Away Collection 25980)

Figure 73

Glenelg Historical Pageant, 1934. 'Pioneer Settlers' and 'Marines' from the *Buffalo*
Landing near Patawalonga Creek.
(Mortlock Library South Australia, Pic No 8334/120)

Figure 74

'A Sunset Reverie, 1788'
(*Centennial Magazine*, December 1888)

Figure 75

'The Pioneer', portrait engraving of Captain Arthur Phillip by H Macbeth-Rauburn.
(National Library of Australia: NLA Acc No S4824)

Figure 76

'The Founding of Australia' Print of painting by Algernon Talmage of First Fleet at Sydney Cove 1788, 1937
(National Library of Australia: NLA.Pic-an4910556)

Figure 77

Sydney Harbour Bridge Celebrations, 1932.
(ML, SLNSW, Home and Away Collection 38597)

Figure 78

Daily Telegraph special rotogravure anniversary 150th edition, *Daily Telegraph* 9 February 1938
(*Daily Telegraph* 9 February 1938)

Figure 79

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/11)

Figure 80

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/15)

Figure 81

Programme: *Pageants: Landing of Governor Phillip and Australia's March to Nationhood*, 26 January 1938, pp 14-15.
(ML, SLNSW)

Figure 82

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/36)

Figure 83

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/35)

Figure 84

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/41)

Figure 85

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/19)

Figure 86

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/6)

Figure 87

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/9)

Figure 88

Lifesaver and Captain Cook, *Walkabout*, January 1938.
(Reproduced in Kay Saunders, "'The specimens of superb manhood': The lifesaver as national icon," *Journal of Australian Studies*, Special issue 'Australian Masculinities', No 56, 1998, p 102)

Figure 89

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/10)

Figure 90

Rockdale Council floats in 1951 Jubilee procession.
(Home and Away Collection 32763, ML SLNSW)

Figure 91

Nicholson cartoon, 1988: 'No no no ad libbing thank you'
(In Kaz Cook (Comp) *Beyond a Joke: An Anti-Bicentenary Cartoon Book*, McPhee Gribble, 1988.)

Figure 92

Dempsey Cavers, 6, sitting on Kurnell memorial to Forby Sutherland, the first British subject to die in Australia
(Photograph by Andrew Taylor, *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 September 2000, p 5)

Figure 93

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/78)

Figure 94

'At Vaucluse House 100 Years Ago', *Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27.
(*Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27)

Figure 95

Women at Old Sydney Town, 2000.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 96

Reenactment performance, Geelong, Victoria.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 97

'When Duke Visited Portland: Pioneer Days Re-Enacted', *Sydney Mail*, Wed 28 Nov 1934, p 54

(*Sydney Mail*, Wed 28 Nov 1934, p 54)

Figure 98

Sydney Harbour Bridge Celebrations, 1932.
(Home and Away Collection 38646, ML SLNSW)

Figure 99

Frederick McCubbin, painting, *The Pioneer*. Central panel of tryptich.
(Reproduced on backcover, Eve Pownall *Australian Pioneer Women*)

Figure 100

Group of young women in patriotic costume, First World War.
(SPF, ML SLNSW)

Figure 101

'The Australian Venus.'
(*Sydney Sun*, 28 April 1912, p 13.)

Figure 102

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/23)

Figure 103

1938 Sesquicentenary Celebrations
(Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. PHM A59/23)

Figure 104

Glenelg Centenary Pageant, 1936.
(Mortlock Library SA B8334/129)

Figure 105

'At Vacluse House 100 Years Ago', *Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27.
(*Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27)

Figure 106

'At Vacluse House 100 Years Ago', *Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27.
(*Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27)

Figure 107

'At Vacluse House 100 Years Ago', *Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27.
(*Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27)

Figure 108

'At Vacluse House 100 Years Ago', *Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27.
(*Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27)

Figure 109

'At Vacluse House 100 Years Ago', *Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27.
(*Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1938, pp 26-27)

Figure 110

Group of women at reenactment event, Hill End, 1972.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 111

'Pioneer Woman' in colonial kitchen.
(Reproduced in Eve Pownall *Australian Pioneer Women*, opp p 126)

Figure 112

'Carnivale' 1980
(GPO 3 – 10513, ML SLNSW)

Figure 113

1951 Sturt Reenactment
(*Wagga Daily Advertiser*, 3 January 1951, p 2)

Figure 114

1951 Sturt Reenactment, on the Murray River

Figure 115

1951 Sturt Reenactment

Figure 116

Etching of explorers and Aboriginal people on edge of cliff, Blue Mountains. No date, no attribution (nineteenth century).
(Reproduced in Peter Stanley, *The Blue Mountains: Grand Adventure for All*, Macleay Museum, 2nd Ed, 1988, p 58.)

Figure 117

1951 Sturt Reenactment, Goolwa, South Australia.
(Mortlock Library, South Australia, B21731)

Figure 118

Actor Grant Taylor as Charles Sturt.
(*Gundagai Independent*, 27 November 1950)

Figure 119

Monument to Sturt, 1999.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 120

Jubilee memorial park, 1999.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 121

Bushranging reenactment, 1960s.
(Mortlock Library, South Australia, B49076)

Figure 122

Sturt Reenactment, 1951. White 'Aborigine'.
(*Narranderra Argus*, 4 January 1951, p 2.)

Figure 123

Watching the filming of the 1951 Sturt Reenactment.
(*Sydney Morning Herald* 1951)

Figure 123

School children. Guidebook, *Sovereign Hill*, Sovereign Hill Museums Association, 1998
(Sovereign Hill)

Figure 124

Costumed 'Hostess' at Colonial Williamsburg, United States c 1930s.
(Colonial Williamsburg Collection, CWF 1967)

Figure 125

Costumed living history interpreters. Colonial Williamsburg c 1970.
(Colonial Williamsburg Collection, CWF 95-297)

Figure 126

Tourist booklet. *Old Sydney Town: Re-creating the birth of a nation 1788-1810*
(Old Sydney Town)

Figure 127

Promotional Pamphlet, *Sovereign Hill*.
(Sovereign Hill)

Figure 128

'Creating a Mishoon'. Plymouth Historical Plantation, United States.
(<http://www.plymouth.org>)

Figure 129

'Welcome to the Seventeenth Century'. Plymouth Historical Plantation, U.S.
(<http://www.plymouth.org>)

Figure 130

Map of settlement, Swan Hill
(*Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Guide Book*, nd.)

Figure 131

Reenactment and display of Holterman (Gold) Nugget, Hill End, NSW, 1972.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 132

Members of Fellowship of First Fleeters.
(J Cowell & R Best, *Where First Fleeters Lie*, p 194.)

Figure 133

Guidebook, *Your Introduction to Sovereign Hill*, 1987, p 9
(Sovereign Hill)

Figure 134

Pinchgut (Fort Denison, Sydney Harbour) tourism campaign with historical reenactment, 1980.
(Australian Photographic Agency Collection APA 43913, ML SLNSW)

Figure 135

Steam train, Korrumburra Pioneer Village, Victoria.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 136

Saluting the Georgian Union Flag at Australia Day reenactment
(GPO4-52928, ML SLNSW)

Figure 137

Carnivale 81, The Domain, Sydney.
(GPO 3-18051, ML SLNSW)

Figure 138

Reenactment c 1972, Hill End.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 139

Medieval combat, Armidale Living History event, Armidale, NSW, 2000.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 140

Medieval reenactors, United States, 1970.
(<http://www.earlysca.homestead.com>)

Figure 141

'Native American', Kirby Hall reenactment event, 1999 UK.
(<http://home-4tiscali.nl/~t401243/kirby/>)

Figure 142

'Whistling Dixie Down Under'.

(Front cover, 'Good Weekend' colour supplement, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 June 1998)

Figure 143

American Civil War reenactor, Bairnsdale, Victoria, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 144

Reenactment event aboard the *Batavia*, National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 145

American Civil War Reenactment, Taminick, Victoria, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 146

Boer War reenactment, Goulburn, NSW, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 147

Reenactment event aboard the *Batavia*, National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 148

Medieval Combat, Armidale Living History weekend, Armidale, NSW, 2000.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 149

Boer War reenactors, Goulburn, 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 150

Three members of Sydney-based Medieval music group 'Wayward', 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 151

Medieval reenactment event, Australia, 1998.
(Photograph by Glenn Hunt, to accompany article in regular feature 'Sunday' by Deborah McIntosh, in 'Sunday Life' Colour supplement, *Sun-Herald*, 28 June 1998, p 7.)

Figure 152

Colonial reenactment event Taminick, Victoria, 2000.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 153

Colonial dance at Old Sydney Town, 2001.

(Author's Collection)

Figure 154

Slave Quarter, Carter's Grove Plantation, Colonial Williamsburg, United States.
(Colonial Williamsburg collection, CWF 81 6857)

Figure 155

Kirby Hall
(<http://home-4tiscali.nl/~t401243/kirby/>)

Figure 156

The author at a seventeenth-century reenactment event, Sydney 2001.
(Author's Collection)

Figure 157

Recreated American Civil War stereograph, showing the author, with digital detail.
(Author's Collection)

Abstract

The reenactment of the past itself has a history. This thesis analyses self-styled 'historical reenactors' in the West and traces the history of the broader phenomenon of historical reenactment in the Australian context from the late nineteenth century to the present. The historical section focuses on several events significant in Australian cultural memory that have been reenacted over time. Historical parades, pageants and reenactments dramatically narrate culturally specific historical sensibilities and demonstrate inter and cross cultural exchanges of historical consciousness. I contend such performances have had a significant position in the formation of popular history since the late nineteenth century and that there is a continuity of conventions in performing the past. I have addressed the position of reenactments as part of a constant interest in the status and power of history in, and for, popular culture. I have shown how a form of history that operated *for* the public was transformed into a form of history operated *by* the public in a struggle for authority over the form and content of history. Historical reenactments have been useful avenues for elites to create didactic spectacular history that have also offered the opportunity for marginalised groups to make social and political gains through their participation in the making of public history. Considering the significance of reenactments in the formation of a distinctly Australian public history, they have received little attention from historians. As ephemera, reenactments sit awkwardly in the explanatory frameworks regularly used by historians. Using methodologies from a range of academic disciplines such as performance studies, anthropology and cultural studies, this thesis documents and interrogates the specific form of historical reenactment. In the sections of this thesis that analyse contemporary historical reenactments, I use my own experience as an historical reenactor of more than ten years in an ethnographic approach that reflects on the pleasures, promises and problems 'dressing up as if from the past' offers. In this history I draw continuities between past reenactments and present practices that assist in understanding historical reenactment as a specific cultural form. This thesis contends that reenactments over time have been characterised by three main elements: a collapsing of past and present, an avenue for a 'connectedness' with the past through a sensual experience, and an essential relationship with 'authenticity.'